



Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters

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Foreword

The 2000 federal general election saw a significant decline in the number of Canadians who voted: slightly more than 64 percent of registered electors chose to exercise their right to vote, compared to 67 percent in the 1997 general election and 69.6 percent in 1993. Following the election, political representatives, media commentators, researchers and others expressed considerable concern about this development.

The Chief Electoral Officer is mandated to ensure that the electoral process is as accessible as possible to Canadians. This is key to encouraging voter participation. Moreover, the *Canada Elections Act* provides me with the authority to implement public education and information programs about the electoral process. Such programs need to be based on a solid foundation, and where required this entails commissioning research from academics with expertise in electoral matters.

In this context, it is beneficial to examine why such a significant number of Canadians stayed away from the polls at the 2000 election. We commissioned professors Jon Pammett (Carleton University) and Lawrence LeDuc (University of Toronto) to carry out a major research project to explore the factors related to electors' decisions not to vote on that occasion.

The authors' study is based on a major survey conducted by Decima Research. Interviews were conducted with almost 1 000 Canadians who did not vote in the 2000 election and a similar number who did vote. Professors Pammett and LeDuc provide a detailed analysis of the survey results and identify a number of factors which, in their assessment, are linked to non-voting. The findings about the level of voter participation of younger Canadians and their reasons for not voting merit particular attention.

Elections Canada is pleased to publish this study and I wish to thank professors Pammett and LeDuc for their excellent work and their collaboration with us. The observations and conclusions are those of the authors.

I trust that you will find this research study informative and that it will enrich public debate about measures to help reverse the recent decline in voter participation in federal elections.

Jean-Pierre Kingsley
Chief Electoral Officer of Canada



Executive Summary

This report presents the major findings of a survey of Canadians carried out in April 2002. The sample design included a short screening interview with a large number of Canadians (5 637) and a longer interview with 960 reported voters in the 2000 federal election and 960 reported non-voters in that election. Interviews were thus obtained with a much larger group of non-voters than is customary in election-related surveys of the Canadian public, allowing a detailed examination of their reasons for not voting.

After a brief introduction illustrating the phenomenon of turnout declines, the report examines responses given by non-voters in the 2000 federal election about their reasons for not going to the polls. Those reasons include lack of interest in the election, negative attitudes toward politics, and personal/administrative factors. Young non-voters were more likely to cite lack of interest and personal/administrative reasons for not voting.

The report then examines a series of correlates of not voting, starting with socio-demographic factors. Age, education, income, place of birth and mobility all relate to voting/not voting, but age is the most important factor. The rate of voter participation declines steadily as one moves from the oldest to the youngest age cohorts. There is even a slight difference in the voting rates of some of the older cohorts in the study, with those who entered the electorate during the 1968 and 1972 federal elections participating at lower rates than those who entered earlier. However, the greatest declines occur in subsequent generations. Less than two thirds of those who entered the electorate during the 1974–1980 period voted in 2000, while only 54.2 percent of those who entered during the 1984–88 period did so. From that point forward, the voting rate slips well below half, with the cohort that entered the electorate in 1993 voting at 38.2 percent in 2000, the 1997 cohort at 27.5 percent, and those eligible to vote for the first time in 2000 voting at a rate of just 22.4 percent.

Important attitudinal and behavioural factors in voting/not voting include: feelings of inefficacy; civic duty and political interest; and perception of the effectiveness of the vote. People are less likely to cast a ballot if they feel they have no influence over government actions, do not feel voting is an essential civic act, or do not feel the election is competitive enough to make their votes matter to the outcome, either at the national or the local constituency level.

Three additional topics are investigated at greater length. The first is the political attitudes of youth, including the ways in which young people might be encouraged to take a greater interest in politics. Enhanced political education is the major suggestion of young people themselves, together with an injection into federal politics of issues that are more relevant to youth. The second is the possible improvement in the voting rate that might be produced by use of the Internet for adding to and updating the National Register of Electors, and/or for voting itself. The authors estimate that a small increase in the voting rate would accompany the introduction of a system of Internet voting and registration. Third, the report offers a more detailed analysis of the personal and administrative factors behind not voting. There is considerable evidence from this study that more needs to be done to ensure the registration of the maximum number of citizens, particularly young people becoming eligible for the first time, in the National Register of

Electors. In addition, the predominance of reasons for not voting in this study relating to lack of time or absence from the constituency leads to the observation that new technologies could help to provide solutions to these problems.

Much of the data explored in this report leads to the conclusion that voting rates will likely continue to decline in Canada. The voting rates of generations entering the electorate in the last two decades, and particularly since 1993, are substantially lower than those of previous generations. While "life cycle" effects help to increase the initial low participation rate of all generations, they have not brought those who became eligible during the 1980s or later up to the participation levels of earlier entrants. There has been, according to the authors, a long-term secular decline in the electoral participation of successive generations of Canadians. An effective response to this trend will require more than short-term, small-scale reform measures. The evidence assembled in this report indicates that further efforts in the areas of education and administration of elections could have some beneficial impact.

Introduction

This report explores the major findings of a survey of Canadians carried out in April 2002. It was designed by the authors in co-operation with Elections Canada and conducted by Decima Research. The sample design called for a short screening interview with a large number of Canadians (5 637) and a longer interview to be continued with 960 reported voters in the 2000 federal general election and 960 reported non-voters in that election.¹ In this way, interviews were obtained with a much larger group of non-voters than is customary in election-related surveys of the Canadian public. This allowed the examination of their reasons for not voting in considerable detail, and more confidence to be placed in the accuracy of the results than is possible when smaller numbers of respondents are involved.

The survey was designed to measure a wide variety of explanations for not voting, both in general and in reference to the increase in not voting that has occurred in the last three federal elections.

After a brief introduction illustrating the phenomenon of turnout decline, this report examines the reasons survey respondents gave for not going to the polls in the 2000 general election. The report then examines a series of correlates of not voting, starting with socio-demographic factors. Here, and throughout the report, particular attention is paid to the factor of age. In conjunction with socio-demographics, a number of important attitudinal and behavioural factors in voting/not voting are examined in succeeding sections: civic duty and political interest; efficacy of the vote; feelings of community and participation (commonly referred to as "social capital"); and attitudes towards electoral reform. Finally, three topics are investigated at greater length. The first is the political attitudes of youth, including the ways in which young people might be encouraged to take a greater interest in politics. The second is the possible improvement in the voting rate that might be produced by use of the Internet for electoral registration and/or for voting itself. Finally, the report offers a more detailed analysis of personal and administrative factors involved in not voting, including matters relating to the National Register of Electors.

¹ A system of corrective weights was calculated for the dataset by Decima Research, and the weighted data is used for most tables in this report. The total weighted N for non-voters in the 2000 general election is 1 097.

1. Trends in Voter Turnout

As Figure 1 indicates, turnout in Canadian federal elections, as a percentage of registered electors, averaged about 75 percent in the years after the Second World War.² Three notable exceptions to this trend occurred in 1953, 1974 and 1980. While part of the explanation for these earlier drops in turnout can be traced to the fact that the elections in question were held either at the height of summer or in winter,³ part can also be found in the political situations of the time. The 1953 election came during a long period of one-party dominance. The 1974 and 1980 elections were occasioned by the fall of minority governments and held in a climate of relative public dissatisfaction with politics in general.

In contrast to those earlier cases, the recent drop in turnout has been more prolonged, falling steadily over the last three elections – to 70 percent in 1993, 67 percent in 1997, and finally to just over 61 percent in the 2000 general election. The issue of voter turnout, once a topic of interest to a small group of academics, has become a source of concern to the wider scholarly community, the media and attentive members of the general public.

At the same time, as Figure 2 shows, turnout has been declining in many other industrialized countries.⁴ Turnout in French parliamentary elections has declined to levels as low as those observed in Canada, while in the United Kingdom it has fallen even lower.⁵ In American presidential elections, the participation of registered voters has been declining over the last two decades. Of course, deficiencies in the registration process itself are an important factor in analyzing American turnout. When taken as a percentage of the voting-age population, barely half of eligible Americans turn out to vote for a President, while for other offices the participation rate is even lower.

As these international examples illustrate, the recent decline in Canadian voter turnout is by no means exceptional. This does not make it any less a cause for concern. The present study seeks to identify the underlying causes of this decline so that measures might be taken to address it effectively.

² The turnout of 61.2% in 2000 was adjusted to arrive at the final turnout of 64.1%, after our normal maintenance of the National Register of Electors to remove the names of deceased electors and duplicates arising from moves. The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada explained the adjustment during his appearance before the Subcommittee on Electoral Boundaries Readjustment on October 6, 2003, and his appearance to discuss the 2004 Main Estimates before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on March 5, 2004.

³ Data on turnout in Canadian federal elections come from *A History of the Vote in Canada* (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1997, Table 1, p. 102).

⁴ August in 1953, July in 1974 and February in 1980.

⁵ Data for Figure 2 come from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

⁶ *Voter engagement and young people* (London: Electoral Commission 2002).

See <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/voterengagementyoungpl.cfm>

Figure 1. Voting Turnout in Canadian Federal Elections (1945–2000)

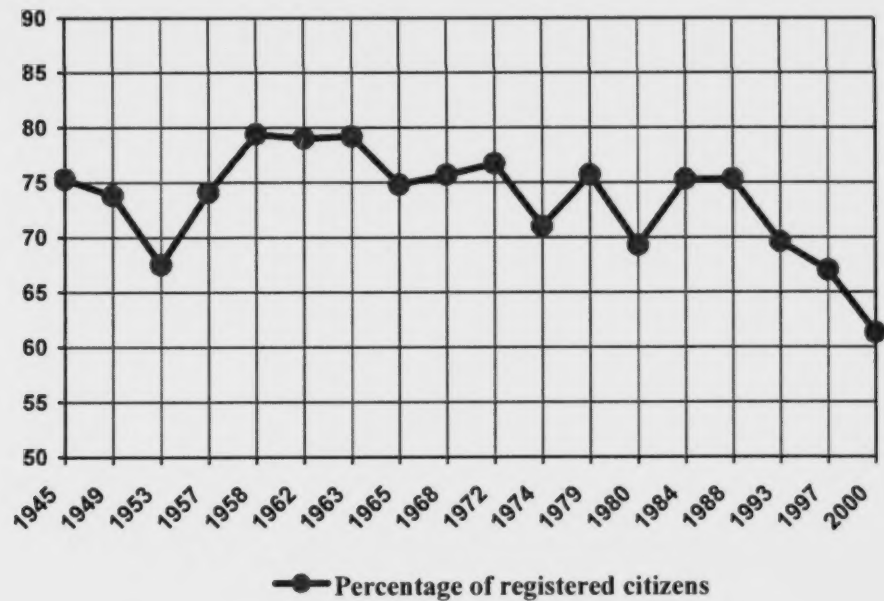
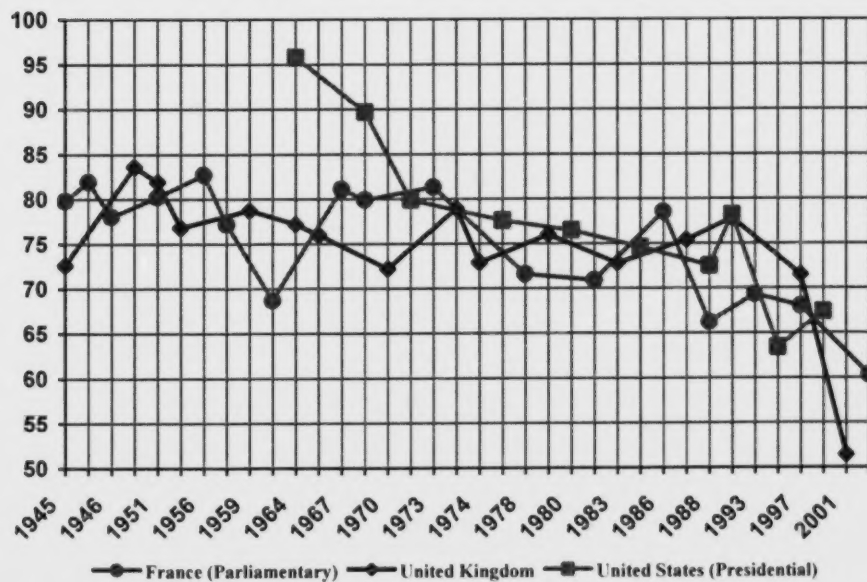


Figure 2. Voting Turnout in Selected Foreign Countries



2. Reasons for Not Voting

Table 1 Reasons for the Turnout Decline (open-ended; multiple responses)

	Percentage of all respondents	Percentage of non-voters
Politicians and Political Institutions		
Politicians (negative public attitudes)	26.2	24.9
Government (negative public attitudes)	13.0	16.0
Candidates (negative public attitudes)	11.7	12.4
Political parties (negative public attitudes)	6.3	6.2
Issues (negative public attitudes)	5.5	4.2
Leaders (negative public attitudes)	3.3	2.3
Electoral system (negative public attitudes)	1.0	0.5
Election administration (problems)	1.0	1.2
	68.0	67.7
Meaninglessness		
Meaninglessness of participation	15.7	14.5
Lack of competition	14.0	8.6
Regional discontent	2.8	1.8
	32.5	24.9
Public Apathy		
Apathy and lack of interest	22.7	24.2
Turned attention elsewhere	5.1	5.8
Lack of knowledge, information	4.3	5.0
Cynicism	4.0	3.4
Youth not voting	3.1	1.9
	39.2	40.3
Other		
Do not know	1.4	2.5
N =	4 659	848

In Table 1, and all other tables with multiple responses, category totals should be regarded as approximate, since respondents may give more than one response in the same category.

As an introduction, we may look at the reasons given by those in the current study to the open-ended question, "Voter turnout has been declining in recent Canadian federal elections. In your opinion, why is turnout going down?" This question was asked very early in the questionnaire, so that there were no specific questions the respondent could reference when thinking about this one. It was asked as part of the screening interview, before the respondents were asked whether they themselves had voted. It therefore has a large sample size, and gives a very broad, statistically accurate picture of the perceptions of Canadians on this subject. In Table 1 we present the general answers of all respondents, and also those given by a specific subset, those who did not vote in the 2000 federal election. Most of the answers from those who did not vote in 2000 are quite similar to the total, but a few differences will be mentioned.

The majority of Canadians attribute the turnout decline to negative public attitudes toward the performance of the politicians and political institutions involved in federal politics. The objects of perceived public displeasure run the complete gamut of personnel and institutions, but the most prominently mentioned were "politicians" and "the government", general terms which indicate the broad nature of the attitudes people ascribe to others. We must remember that these negative attitudes were not necessarily personally held by respondents who voted in the election. However, it is likely that the feelings reported here are fairly widespread.

The lodestones of discontent are politicians and the government. There is a widespread perception that politicians are untrustworthy, selfish, unaccountable, lack credibility, are not true to their word, etc. Similarly, the government, sometimes with a capital "G" and sometimes without, betrays the people's trust, and accomplishes little. Candidates are mentioned frequently, because the question asked specifically about the turnout decline, thereby raising the election context. As one might expect, they are perceived to have the same faults as "politicians". Political parties are singled out as well, because some attributed the lowered voting rate to the difficulties people might have in finding any good choices, or in distinguishing between the parties that do exist. And some said that potential voters have difficulty in relating to the issues brought forward by the parties at election time, or sometimes that the proposed policies are misguided.

With the answers just described relating to the deficiencies of political actors and institutions, it is difficult to discern what might have happened in recent years to precipitate a major decline in the voting rate. After all, citizens have complained about politicians and governments for a long time, and it is hard to believe that one could find any objective measure of "decline in quality" of candidates or elected officials, or of the actions of government.

To some degree, the malaise of discontent noted so far may be produced by a widespread feeling that political participation is meaningless. A number of these responses are captured specifically in the second section of Table 1, but such feelings may lie behind some of the other responses as well. Those classified under the "meaninglessness" heading commented on the lack of choice in elections, that voting would not change anything. "It's always the same thing over and over," said some. Others referred to the situation of "single party dominance", which made it seem that there was no realistic hope of an alternative government. It is reasonable to point out, however, that those who did not vote in 2000 were less likely to cite the lack of competition as a general diagnosis of the cause of falling turnout than the total group. And the ensuing analysis in this report finds that a perceived lack of competition is but one of several reasons for not casting a ballot.

The final major category in Table 1 identifies the responses that blamed public "apathy" for the decline in voting. According to many people, we are faced with a situation where people just do not care, do not pay attention, are lazy, or do not find the political scene exciting enough. A variation of this explanation is that people see non-voters as simply interested in other things, giving political participation a low priority. Or perhaps it is because those choosing not to vote have not bothered to get the information required to cast a meaningful vote. Some cited attitudes of cynicism, disillusionment, discouragement, frustration and hopelessness. Some specifically targeted young people as responsible for the voting decline, an observation which we will examine closely in this report, but one which does not provide reasons for this being so.

Overall, there seems a general recognition among the Canadian public that the voter turnout rate is declining and that there are identifiable explanations for the situation. Many of the problems identified defy easy solution, as they may well result from shifts in popular perceptions and expectations of the political system rather than any behavioural change among politicians and governments. Combined with a number of the analyses in this report, they suggest that the turnout decline we have been seeing in the 1990s may continue for some time to come.

The answers given by the general public to the question, "Why is turnout going down?", while they cluster around a number of major themes, are by no means centred on only one. Similarly, the open-ended question posed to non-voters, "What was the main reason you did not cast a ballot?", brought a variety of responses. Furthermore, some of the answers, related to decreased interest in elections, and in politics more generally, raise more questions than they answer. If declining turnout is a result of declining interest, why is interest going down? We may, therefore, expect to find a variety of explanations that combine to explain the low turnout in recent Canadian federal elections, rather than one single "key" to the situation. Another reason for this expectation is that Canadian elections have never seen the overwhelming voter turnouts experienced in some countries, particularly those in which voting is compulsory. The normal turnout since the Second World War has been about 75 percent of registered electors, and studies have often tried to delve into the reasons for non-participation of the remaining 25 percent. These previous surveys, for example as reported by Jon Pammett in "Voter turnout in Canada," in Herman Bakvis, ed., *Voter Turnout in Canada* (Volume 15 of the Research Studies for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing), (Toronto: Dundurn, 1991, p. 39) showed a variety of reasons for not voting. In three election years when an open-ended question was asked of non-voters, about 40 percent said they were uninterested in the election, roughly one third said they were away from their polling places, under 20 percent said they were busy, about 10 percent were sick, and the remainder were unenumerated. We will meet all of these explanations in our questions later in this report. There is, therefore, no particular reason to expect that the **rise in not voting** that we have experienced in the 1990s will be attributable to any one key factor, though some factors may be more important than others.

Table 2 Factor Analysis of Reasons for Not Voting

	1	2
a) I didn't know where or when to vote	.65	.20
b) I was not on the list of electors	.65	.00
c) I didn't think my vote would matter	.00	.60
d) I didn't like any of the candidates or political parties	.00	.59
e) I wasn't concerned with the issues of the campaign	.21	.67
f) I was ill	.70	.00
g) I was out of town	.66	.00
h) I was too busy at work	.52	.00
i) I just wasn't interested in the election	-.18	.67
j) I think there are too many elections	.33	.41
(principal components; varimax rotation)		
Factor 1: Personal/Administrative		
Factor 2: Lack of interest		

The survey asks those who report not voting in 2000 the degree of importance 10 possible reasons had for them. Table 2 reports a factor analysis of this question. Factor analysis is a technique for data reduction, in that it explores the correlations among all the items in a group of variables, and identifies any common underlying commonalities, or factors, which lie behind them. Factor analysis is useful to the extent that the patterns of "factor loadings" (correlations of the individual variables with the underlying factors) have face validity, that is, are readily explicable. A further advantage of this technique is that the individual respondents are given scores ("factor scores") on each factor, which can be used later in a regression analysis as summary variables. Such an analysis will be reported later.

Table 2 shows that underlying the 10 separate potential reasons for not voting in the 2000 federal election, there are two summary factors. Factor 1 has high factor loadings (over .5) on five variables:

- a) I didn't vote because I didn't know where or when to vote.
- b) I didn't vote because I was not on the list of electors.
- c) I didn't vote because I was ill.
- d) I didn't vote because I was out of town.
- e) I didn't vote because I was busy at work.

The five variables listed here, which all load on Factor 1, appear to have sufficient coherence that we can name this a **personal/administrative factor**. The first two components of this factor, lack of information about the poll(ing) and not being on the list of electors, are clearly administrative in nature. The third, illness, and the fourth, absence from home, are connected in the sense that, had it been convenient for such people to cast their ballots under the circumstances of being confined by sickness or being away from the place they would normally be expected to vote, they might well have voted. Saying this is not to imply that Elections Canada is at fault for not collecting their votes; it simply means that under ideal administrative arrangements, they might have voted. Finally, the item "busy at work" as a reason for not voting loads on this factor, rather than the other one. This is interesting and worth exploring in more detail, since it was by no means self-evident that people who said they were busy were not just

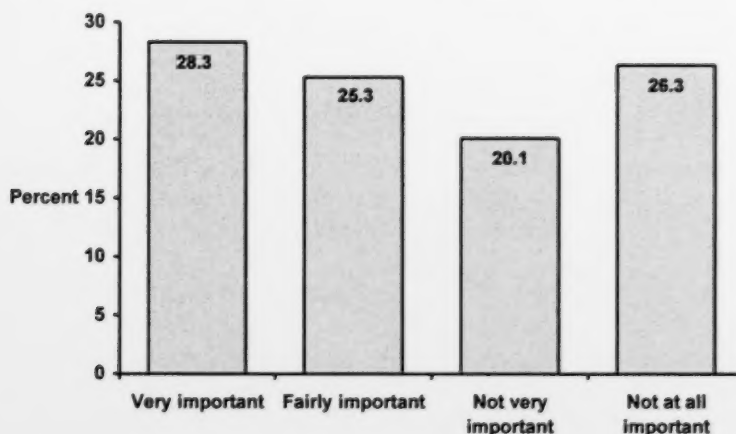
rationalizing what was really another kind of reason, lack of interest in the election. However, the fact that those who were “busy at work” load on Factor 1 makes it likely that they fall into the same category as the sick, the absent, and the unregistered – people who perceive that they were inhibited from casting a vote they might otherwise have cast.

Factor 2, displayed in Table 2, is of quite a different type than Factor 1. It includes the variables:

- c) I didn't vote because I didn't think my vote would matter.
- d) I didn't vote because I didn't like any of the candidates or political parties.
- e) I didn't vote because I wasn't concerned with the issues of the campaign.
- i) I didn't vote because I just wasn't interested in the election.

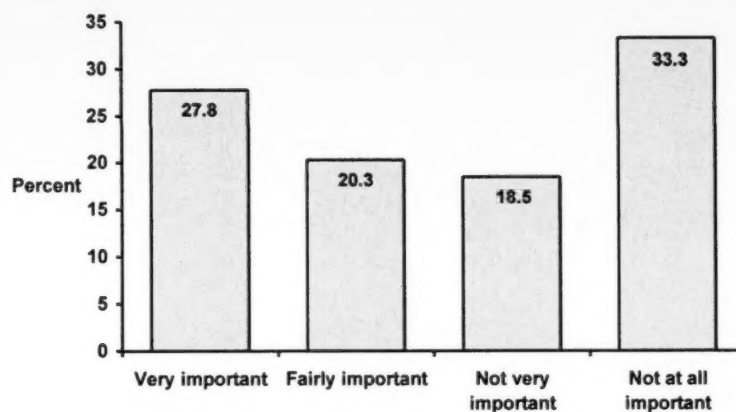
Factor 2 can be reasonably labelled a **lack of interest factor**. It groups together those who did not vote because they felt the election was uninteresting, their vote unimportant, and the parties, candidates and issues unengaging. Lack of interest, as measured by these questions, and others in the survey, was a major factor in explaining the low turnout in the 2000 general election. For example, over half (53 percent) of non-voters in 2000 said that the reason “I just wasn't interested in the election” was either “very” or “fairly” important in their decision not to cast a ballot.

Table 3 Importance of Reason: “I didn't vote because I just wasn't interested in the election”



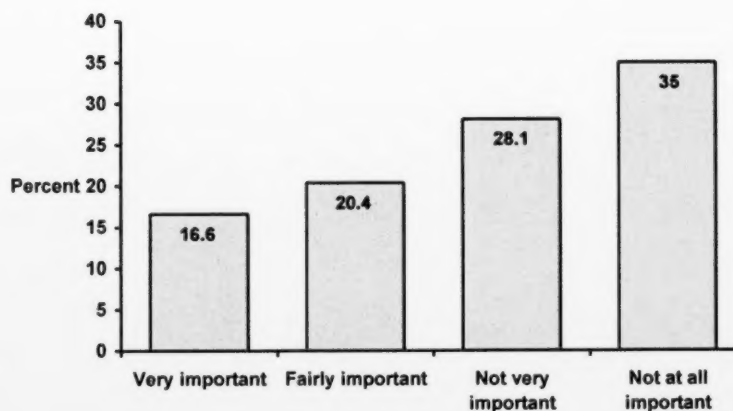
□ Importance of reason: I didn't vote because I wasn't interested in the election

Table 4 Importance of Reason: "I didn't vote because I didn't like any of the candidates or political parties"



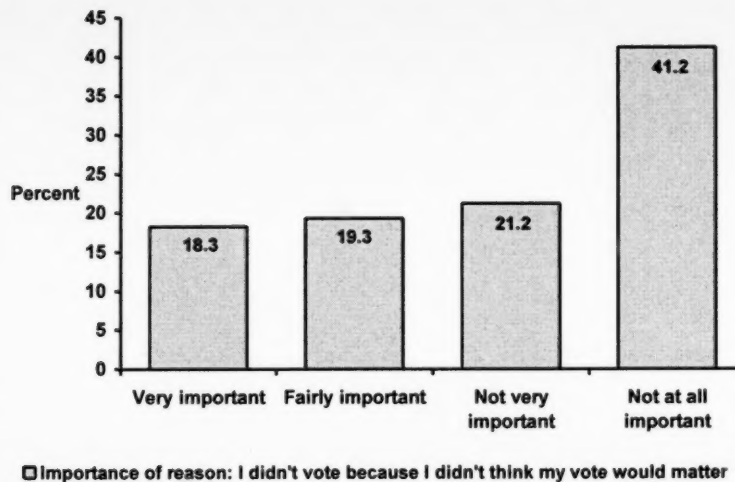
□ Importance of reason: I didn't vote because I didn't like any of the candidates or political parties

Table 5 Importance of Reason: "I didn't vote because I wasn't concerned with the issues of the campaign"



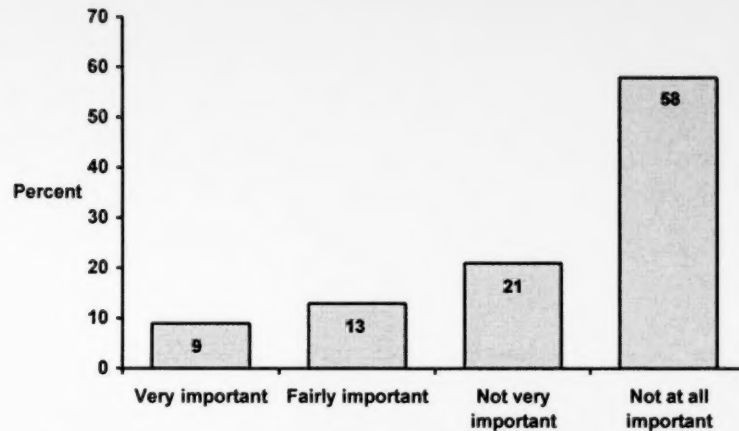
□ Importance of reason: I didn't vote because I wasn't concerned with the issues of the campaign

Table 6 Importance of Reason: "I didn't vote because I didn't think my vote would matter"



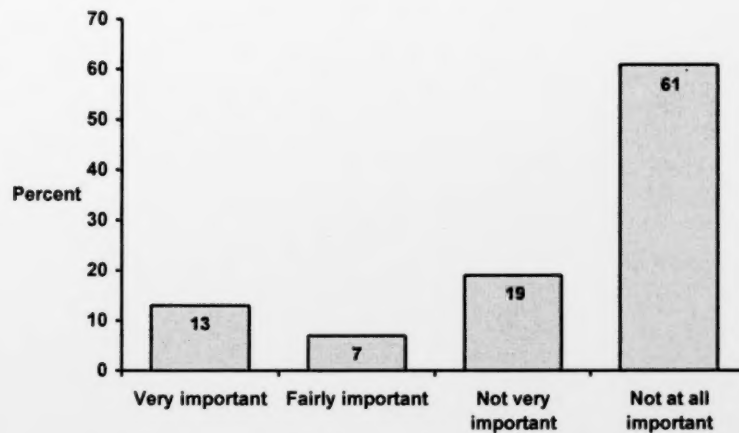
Let us examine first the variables measuring lack of interest in the election. By far the most frequently cited as important was "I just wasn't interested in the election" (Table 3). Over half of 2000 non-voters thought this was either "very important" or "fairly important" to their decision. While lack of interest may not connote a negative reaction to the set of alternatives on offer in the election, Tables 4 and 5 are more sharply focused in a negative direction. A substantial number of those not voting said they did not like any of the candidates or parties (47 percent) or were not concerned with the issues of the campaign (37 percent). As one might expect, lack of interest in the election correlates with not liking the parties or candidates (Taub = .15, $p < .000$) and with not being concerned with the issues of the campaign (Taub = .25, $p < .000$). A fourth reason, "I did not think my vote would matter" is cited by 37 percent as being important to some degree in their decision, and this factor is also intercorrelated with the other four.

Table 7 Importance of Reason: "I didn't know where or when to vote"



□ Importance of reason: I didn't vote because I didn't know where or when to vote

Table 8 Importance of Reason: "I was not on the list of electors"



□ Importance of reason: I didn't vote because I was not on the list of electors

Now let us consider the personal/administrative factors in not voting. Tables 7 and 8 show that about one fifth of those who did not vote said that lack of knowledge about the time and place to vote, or not being on the list of electors, was either "very" or "fairly" important to their decision. As one might expect, these two variables are fairly strongly correlated ($Taub = .33, p < .000$), which indicates that many of these are the same people. Since those who were not on the lists would not receive a voter information card telling them the hours and location of their polling

place, they could reasonably cite both factors as being important to them. To estimate the impact on the total electorate, we need to put this in proportion. Perhaps the best measure of the direct impact of not being on the list of electors is the 12.7 percent of non-voters who said this was a "very important" factor to them. Since the overall voting rate was 61 percent, not being on the lists could be said to have depressed the voter turnout by about 5 percent ($12.7 \text{ percent} \times .39 = 4.95 \text{ percent}$), if only these people who said it was "very important" are taken into account. If we add to them the people who said it was "fairly important," that number would rise.

However, this calculation is highly conjectural, since those saying that administrative factors were important to them often also mentioned "lack of interest" factors as important. For example, there is a positive correlation between respondents saying that it was important to the decision not to cast a vote that they were not on the list, and saying that it was important that they were not concerned with any of the issues of the campaign (Taub = .15, $p < .000$). So if these respondents had been on the lists, they might still not have voted, for other reasons. If one is willing to make the assumptions that 1) a door-to-door enumeration would have placed everybody on the list of electors, and 2) those for whom it was "very important" that they were not on the list would have voted if they had been there, regardless of the degree of their interest in the election, the deficiencies in the list of electors might have depressed the turnout by 5 percent. However, the most realistic conclusion is that the actual effect was less than that, perhaps somewhere around 2 or 3 percent.

Table 9 Importance of Reason: "I was ill"

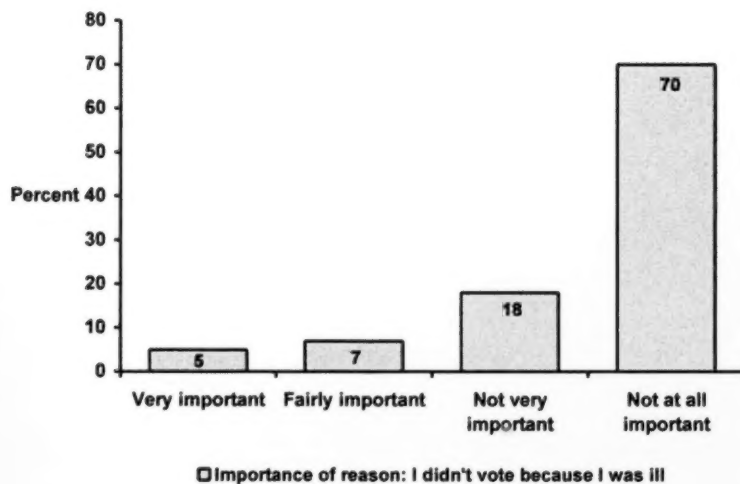


Table 10 Importance of Reason: "I was out of town"

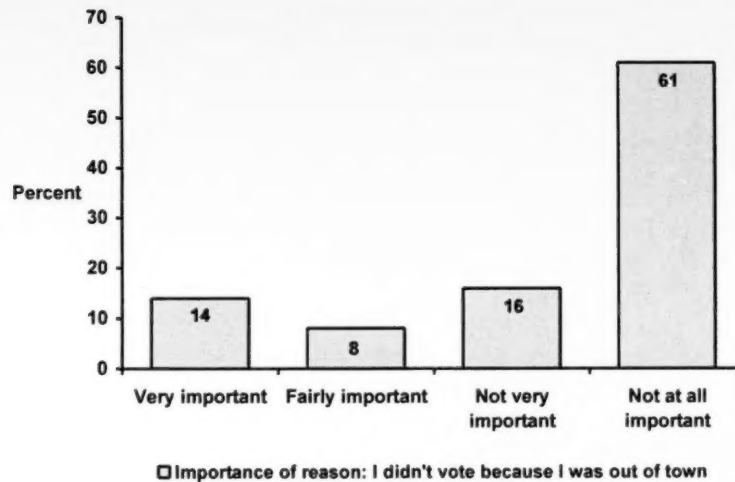
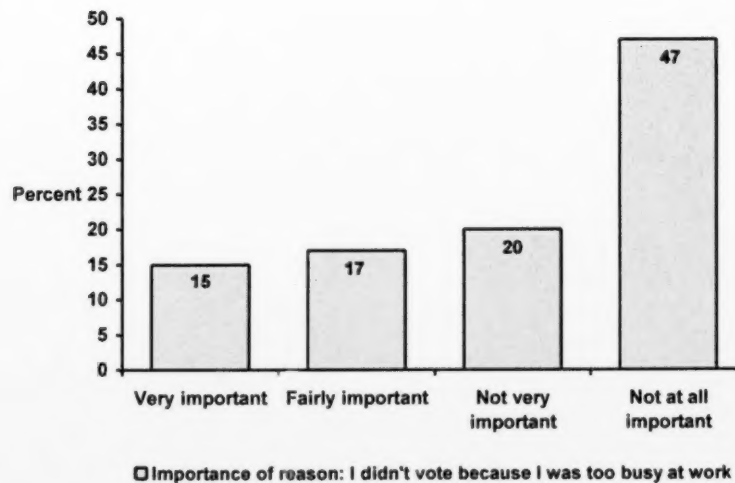


Table 11 Importance of Reason: "I was too busy at work"



The next three tables show that other "personal/administrative" factors were associated with not voting to varying degrees. Provisions in the *Canada Elections Act* allow people who are ill, or who are out of town (tables 9 and 10) to register their choices at the advance polls and through the special ballot. However, these remedies often require advance planning, and the extra effort involved in implementing them is a deterrent to those who may not feel they have the energy, time and interest to provide motivation.

Finally, there are those who were "too busy at work", a group comprising almost one third of all non-voters, if one counts those for whom this factor was "very" or "fairly important". Of course, the Act provides that time off must be given to employees for voting purposes. But the demands of the workplace may have added obstacles for those who felt that other deterrents existed. We must remember that this variable loaded on the "personal/administrative factor" and not the "lack of interest" one. The correlations of being too busy at work with other personal/administrative factors are: with "not knowing where or when to vote" (Taub = .26, $p < .000$); with "not being on the list of electors" (Taub = .22, $p < .000$); with being ill (Taub = .19, $p < .000$); and with being "out of town" (Taub = .26, $p < .000$). These correlations are higher than those with "just wasn't interested in the election" (Taub = .01, not statistically significant); "didn't like any of the candidates or parties" (Taub = .06, $p < .03$); "I didn't think my vote would matter" (Taub = .09, $p < .001$); and "I wasn't interested in the issues" (Taub = .15, $p < .000$). So it is not as likely that people for whom this factor was important were just not interested enough to leave work to vote, as it is that some other factor was involved.

Table 12 Main Reasons for Not Voting, 2000 (Open-ended; multiple responses; percentage of respondents)

	Age Groups						
	65+	55-64	45-54	35-44	25-34	18-24	Total
Lack of interest							
Not interested; didn't care; apathy	14.8	29.0	18.3	19.7	27.3	28.0	25.0
Vote meaningless; doesn't count; election foregone conclusion	6.4	8.4	9.6	10.0	11.4	6.5	9.0
Forgot; unaware	4.2	0.0	0.0	1.2	2.0	3.9	2.3
Too complicated; confusing	0.0	0.0	2.3	2.5	0.7	0.0	0.9
	25.4	37.4	30.2	33.4	41.4	38.4	37.2
Negativity							
No appealing candidates/parties/issues	9.9	13.4	22.7	21.2	14.1	13.9	15.9
Lack of faith/confidence in candidates/parties/leaders	17.7	13.5	21.3	16.7	14.0	6.3	12.8
Lack of information about candidates/parties/issues	0.0	1.6	3.3	5.0	3.1	6.3	4.3
Regional discontent	0.0	3.0	3.0	2.8	0.5	0.8	1.4
	27.6	31.5	50.3	45.7	31.7	27.3	34.4
Personal/Administrative							
Too busy with work/school/family	5.0	3.4	3.1	11.9	13.7	22.6	14.3
Away from riding/province/country	20.3	23.0	9.3	8.0	10.9	7.9	10.4
Registration problems	4.0	3.0	6.7	2.7	5.2	7.4	5.5
Illness, health issues	19.5	5.8	7.7	1.9	2.0	0.4	2.9
Didn't know where or when; polling station problems; transportation	5.7	5.1	2.7	2.5	2.2	4.2	3.3
Moving-related problems	0.0	0.0	2.5	1.1	1.2	0.5	0.9
	54.5	40.3	32.0	28.1	35.2	43.0	37.3
Other							
Religious reasons	5.5	3.0	1.5	2.0	1.1	0.9	1.5
Other; unclassifiable; unclear; none	0.0	0.9	0.8	3.1	1.8	3.6	2.4
	5.5	3.9	2.3	5.1	2.9	4.5	3.9
N =	43	58	109	171	331	347	1 059

Table 12 presents open-ended responses of non-voters to a question asking them about the main reason for their decision. The wide array of reasons, which can nevertheless be classified into three broad types (**lack of interest, negativity, and personal/administrative**), are mentioned to roughly equal degrees by non-voters. The largest single group of responses to this question was from those who simply weren't interested in the election (or politics more generally), didn't care it was being held, and did not want to vote. For others in this category, however, it was the meaninglessness of the voting that counted, as they reasoned that their vote would not matter or make a difference, and that the election was a foregone conclusion. A few others in the **lack of interest** category found the whole election scene too confusing for them, or just forgot about it.

We have classified responses as expressing **negativity** rather than simple lack of interest if they indicated a lack of confidence in any of the electoral contestants, candidates, parties or leaders, or said that they could find none of them appealing enough to vote for. Some of these respondents also said they did not find the discussion of issues involving, or they did not have enough information about the issues or other political factors to make a choice. A few of these respondents expressed grievances of one sort or another against the federal level of government, or stated they weren't interested in federal politics.

The third category, **personal/administrative**, has a variety of forms, as we have already seen. We have classified such reasons as "too busy" and "away" in this category, because in other measures in the survey, notably the factor analysis reported in Table 2, they are associated with other personal or administrative reasons rather than those measuring lack of interest. However, undoubtedly, some of those who said they were too busy to vote were simply rationalizing a lower interest level.

Table 12 shows a number of interesting variations in the reasons held by different age groups for not voting. In particular, the youngest age group, those aged 18–24 in 2000, was less likely to express reasons having to do with negative feelings towards political candidates, parties and leaders than were older age groups. They were, however, much more likely to cite personal or administrative reasons for not voting, particularly that they were too busy. They were also somewhat more likely to experience registration problems. The level of lack of interest was also above average in the youngest two age groups.

The oldest age group in the study, those over 65 years old, was most affected by health issues and by absence from their district at election time. And as far as negative feelings toward politicians, parties, etc., are concerned, the middle age groups, those between the mid-30s and the mid-50s, were more likely to cite these reasons.

3. The Correlates of Not Voting

To begin our examination of the correlates of not voting, we will assemble a variety of possible predictors, many of which were identified in our previous report. We will enter into our regression equations several socio-demographic characteristics of respondents:

1. **Age**, as measured by year of birth.
2. **Education**, as measured by the highest level of formal education achieved.
3. **Income**, as measured by total household income.
4. **Gender**.
5. **Place of birth**, whether inside or outside Canada.
6. **Mobility**, as measured by the length of residence in the current neighbourhood or community.

Most of these socio-demographic factors are expected to relate to not voting. Our hypothesis is that young people, as well as people with less education and lower incomes will be less likely to cast a ballot in any given election. We also expect that people who were born outside Canada will be less familiar with the country's politics, and less likely to vote, and that those who are more geographically mobile will also be less likely to vote, as they may be less familiar with the political situation of the area to which they have recently moved. We have no hypothesis about gender differences, but include that as it may be of interest.

We will pay particular attention to the variable of **age**. We know, of course, that age is related to not voting, and always has been: younger people vote at lower rates than older people. If we want to explain why some people vote and others do not, on any given occasion, the variable of age will be an important predictor of the phenomenon. However, we also want to pay attention to age in another form, that of **cohort (age group)**. The youngest age group, under 25, many of them newly eligible, has been particularly likely to abstain from voting in recent elections. We will analyze age cohorts in detail in this report.

These cohorts are formed by grouping ages according to birth year, as shown in Table 13. This treatment allows us to consider patterns that are specific to particular elections, and/or to more broadly defined political eras. The election(s) in which a particular group first became eligible to vote is denoted by the column labelled "first eligibility". Respondents born between 1971 and 1975, for example, would have been between the ages of 25 and 29 at the time of the 2000 federal election, and would have first become eligible to vote in 1993. The number of cases for the total study (including the screening interview) falling into each group is shown in the column labelled "N", and the number of cases of confirmed non-voters is indicated in the column labelled "NV".

Table 13 Distribution of Cases by Age Cohorts

Age in 2000	Birth year	First eligibility	Prime Minister	N	NV
18-20	1980-1982	2000	Chrétien	282	148
21-24	1976-1979	1997	Chrétien	460	207
25-29	1971-1975	1993	Chrétien	512	177
30-37	1963-1970	1984/88	Mulroney	1 023	224
38-47	1953-1962	1974-80	Trudeau	1 099	161
48-57	1943-1952	1968/72	Trudeau	926	85
58-67	1933-1942	1957-63	Diefenbaker/Pearson	638	49
68+	Before 1933	1953	King/St. Laurent	587	35
				5 527	1 086

While a more extensive use of the age cohorts for analysis will occur later in the report, we present here the basic pattern of voting and not voting (Table 14). This table uses the full study, including the screening interview respondents, since "age" and "vote" were two of the very few questions asked of everyone contacted. Because this overall sample over-represents those voting in 2000, we have entered a corrective weight into Table 14 to put voters and non-voters in their correct proportions for that election.⁶

Table 14 Voting and Not Voting in 2000, by Age Cohort

Voted in 2000	Age in 2000								Total percent
	68+	58-67	48-57	38-47	30-37	25-29	21-24	18-20	
Yes	83.3	80.4	76.4	66.2	54.2	38.2	27.5	22.4	61.3
No	16.7	19.6	23.6	33.8	45.8	61.8	72.5	77.6	38.7
N = 2 467									
V = .392 p < .000									

The differences in voting among the age cohorts are extraordinary. The drop-off in electoral participation steadily increases as the cohorts get younger. There is even a slight difference in the voting rates of some of the older cohorts in the study, with those having entered the electorate during the early Trudeau years (aged 48 to 57 in 2000) participating at lower rates than those who entered at earlier periods of time. Those who entered the electorate during the later Trudeau period (aged 38 to 47) voted in 2000 at lower than a two-thirds rate. For those who entered the electorate during the Mulroney years (aged 30 to 37 in 2000) the overall percentage that cast a ballot in 2000 was only 54.2 percent. From that point forward, the voting rate slips to well below half, with the cohort entering the electorate in 1993 voting at 38.2 percent, the 1997 cohort at 27.5 percent, and the 2000 cohort voting at only a 22.4 percent rate.

Thus, the entry of cohorts of new electors who participated at particularly low rates in the last three elections has played a major role in the turnout decline during this period. Table 14 shows that this lessening of electoral participation with subsequent age groups is not a recent

⁶ The weighting was arrived at by weighting each of the non-voters in the sample at 1, and correcting for the oversample of voters by weighting each of these at .34, thereby simulating a sample of 2 467 with a voting rate of 61.3 percent, the actual rate in 2000.

phenomenon, but dates back to those who entered the electorate in the 1970s, if not earlier. The life-cycle effects, which work to increase the voter turnout rates of initially-lower young cohorts, have not brought the Trudeau and Mulroney cohorts up to the levels of the King, St. Laurent, Diefenbaker and Pearson generations. The outlook is even worse for the Chrétien generation, entering from 1993 to 2000, since they are starting their voting rates at such low levels. If life-cycle effects continue their reduced impact on young citizens, the most likely outcome is that voting rates will continue to decline.

Another factor of potential importance is that of **region**. In particular, we know that turnout in the 2000 election in **Ontario** was only 58 percent (Results of the 2000 election, Elections Canada Web site, Table 4). Newfoundland (57.1 percent), and the Northwest Territories (52.2 percent) were also well below the average (61.2* percent), and Alberta (60.2 percent) was slightly below average. However, a preliminary breakdown of important factors by province does not show significant differences between Ontario (the area where we have sufficient cases to be confident of our results) and the national results.

Table 15 Factor Analysis of Variables Related to Interest, Civic Duty and Party Competition

	1	2	3
Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?	.768	.262	-.05
Thinking of the 2000 federal election in the country as a whole, how competitive did you find the political parties to be?	.004	.09	.861
How about the 2000 federal election in your electoral district? How competitive did you find the political parties to be?	.02	.178	.840
In the 2000 federal election, how much chance was there that your vote would make a difference in the country as a whole?	-.008	.857	.170
How much chance was there that your vote would make a difference in your electoral district?	.135	.845	.157
In your view, how important is it that people vote in elections?	.506	.457	-.005
When you were growing up, how often did your family talk about politics and current events?	.717	-.08	.03
How about now? How often do you talk to your family or friends about politics and current events?	.813	.04	.03
Note: principal components; varimax rotation			
Factor 1: Interest, discussion, civic duty			
Factor 2: Vote matters, civic duty			
Factor 3: Parties competitive			

Our second category of predictors of voting and not voting will be derived from two factor analyses, reported in tables 15 and 16. As we have mentioned previously, factor analysis explores the correlations among all the items in a group of variables, and identifies any common underlying commonalities, or factors, which lie behind them. The factor loadings (correlations of

* The turnout of 61.2% in 2000 was adjusted to arrive at the final turnout of 64.1%, after our normal maintenance of the National Register of Electors to remove the names of deceased electors and duplicates arising from moves. The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada explained the adjustment during his appearance before the Subcommittee on Electoral Boundaries Readjustment on October 6, 2003, and his appearance to discuss the 2004 Main Estimates before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on March 5, 2004.

the individual variables with the underlying factors) are presented in tables 15 and 16, and factor scores will be used in the ensuing regression analyses.

Table 15 reports a factor analysis of variables including political interest. Our purpose in using this technique is to observe which variables load on the same factor as political interest, so as to use a more complex factor to predict voting. Political interest by itself raises as many questions as it answers, as we have mentioned before. We have included in the factor analysis a measure of "civic duty", namely the perceived importance of voting in elections. We also included two "political discussion" variables, one measuring socialization, that is, whether people discussed politics with their parents when they were growing up, and one measuring current frequency of discussing politics with other people. We are also interested here in the impact of a perceived competitive situation on voter turnout, on the hypothesis that if people feel their vote will matter more they will be more likely to vote, and that if the political parties in the country, and in the respondent's riding, are seen as more competitive, the vote will also seem to matter more and turnout will be higher. All of these hypotheses are consistent with a rational-choice approach to voter turnout, which would say that people are more likely to act when it is in their personal interest to engage in that activity rather than some possible competing activity.

Three factors are produced from the group of variables described in the previous paragraph. The first groups political interest with civic duty and with discussing politics, both in the past when growing up, and at present with family and friends. We might refer to this as an "**engaged citizen**" factor. The second also includes the civic duty variable of considering that it is important that people vote in elections, but groups it with the two questions about whether people felt their votes would make a difference, in the country as a whole, or in their electoral districts. These latter two variables have much higher loadings on this factor, and so we might label this a "**vote matters**" factor, hypothesizing that people are more prone to act in circumstances where their vote might make a difference or where it is important to the country that people take part in elections. It can be considered to be consistent with rational-choice theories in the sense that it will be in the elector's self-interest to vote in situations where that vote would make a difference, or "count more", since that would give more value to the choice of that action as opposed to some competing action. The third factor in Table 15 groups the two variables that ask the respondent to rate how competitive they found the political parties to be in the country as a whole, and in the electoral district. This variable is also consistent with the rational-choice approach, and we can call it a "**party competitive**" factor. It is interesting that this factor is distinct from factor 2, involving the questions about whether people felt their vote would matter. The fact that civic duty loads on the second factor and not on the third implies that other considerations than party competition are involved in people deciding whether their vote would matter or not.⁷

⁷ The fact that the **civic duty** variable (measured by the question, "How important is it that people vote in elections?") loads on two factors offers the option to remove it from the factor analysis and treat it independently. When this is done, the factor structure of the analysis in Table 15 remains the same. However, when the variable of civic duty is used as a predictor of voting in 2000 (Table 17) along with the recalculated factor scores and all the other predictors, it becomes the strongest predictor of voting in 2000. It is our view that it is inadvisable to rely on this single indicator of civic duty as an independent predictor of voting, just as we do not wish to use political interest independently, because its explanatory value on its own appears problematic. Just as saying that people do things because they are interested in doing them does not advance the explanation very far, so saying that they vote in a specific election because they feel it is important to vote in elections lacks substantive explanatory power. Using these variables with others as part of factor scores allows some of the impact of these factors to be demonstrated without dominating the analysis.

Table 16 Factor Analysis of Variables Related to Efficacy, Trust and Party Support

	1	2	3
Generally, those elected to Parliament soon lose touch with the people	.648	-.134	-.009
Those elected to Parliament reflect the diversity of Canadian society	-.06	.694	.106
People like me don't have any say about what the government does	.652	.04	-.148
Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on	.369	.578	-.302
I don't think that the government cares much what people like me think	.695	-.133	-.07
Most of the time we can trust people in government to do what is right	-.338	.629	.192
All political parties are basically the same; there really isn't a choice	.584	-.01	-.272
Political parties are the best way of representing people's interests	-.221	.385	.519
The political parties confuse the issues rather than provide clear choices between them	.680	-.05	-.160
Political parties provide good plans for new policies	-.230	.445	.411
During electoral campaign periods, political parties and candidates discuss issues that really are of interest to voters	.08	.01	.811
Political parties are too influenced by people with lots of money	.639	-.155	-.004
Too many political parties represent a small part of the country, rather than the country as a whole	.540	-.04	.137
Note: principal components; varimax rotation			
Factor 1: Inefficacy, cynicism, party negative			
Factor 2: Trust, represented			
Factor 3: Party support			

Table 16 presents the second factor analysis. Here we have included variables measuring the concept of political efficacy, the feeling that one can understand and potentially influence the political process. Also included are measures of trust, in politicians and the political system more generally. Finally, we have included a set of measures of attitudes toward political parties, the primary agents of political representation. A number of these variables measure the degree of positive or negative feelings people have toward parties, as, for example, representing regions or the country as a whole, confusing or clarifying the issues, and being influenced by "people with lots of money."

Three factors are produced in this analysis, as in Table 15. The first is one we will label "**inefficacy, cynicism, negativity to parties**". The questions with high loadings on this factor include such classic "low political efficacy" questions as "those elected to Parliament soon lose touch with the people," "people like me don't have any say about what the government does," and "I don't think that the government cares much what people like me think." Party-related measures which also load on this factor represent agreement with statements that the parties are all the same, that they confuse the issues, that they represent regions of the country to the detriment of national representation, and that they are too influenced by people with money. The second factor represents "**political trust**", including such items as "most of the time we can trust people in government to do what is right" and "those elected to Parliament represent the diversity of Canadian society." Factor three groups two of the "**party support**" questions, "political parties are the best way of representing people's interests," and "during election campaign periods, political parties and candidates discuss issues that really are of interest to voters."

The two factor analyses reported in tables 15 and 16 have produced six factors, and respondents' scores on these will be entered as additional predictor variables into the regressions to follow, joining the socio-demographic predictors already listed. They are:

7. Attitudes reflecting **interest, discussion and civic duty**
8. Sense of **votes mattering and civic duty**
9. Attitudes towards **parties being competitive**; since this variable relates to competitiveness in the 2000 election, it will be used in the regressions in tables 17 and 20 only
10. Feelings of **inefficacy, cynicism and negativity about parties**
11. Feelings of **political trust and effective representation**
12. Expressions of **support for parties**

In addition, we will include in the upcoming regressions one measure of an administrative nature, asked of both voters and non-voters. We will include this measure in all the regressions except that for 1993, since administrative problems in 2000 may be an indication of previous administrative problems as well. For example, the Register of Electors used in the 2000 election was a result of the 1997 list of electors prepared through a door-to-door enumeration. Someone not on the 1997 list would only be on the 2000 list if they took action to register themselves.

13. Whether a person's **name was on the list of electors in 2000**

And in the 2000 analysis only, we will use an additional variable, asking whether the respondent had received any contact from the parties or candidates:

14. Report of **contact by parties or candidates in 2000**

In the four regressions to follow, three of the dependent variables, votes in the 2000, 1997 and 1993 elections, are nominal, that is, have only the two categories: voted, or did not. Some analysts object to the use of OLS regression for nominal dependent variables, and other techniques have been developed for these situations, like probit and logistic regression. We prefer to report the OLS regressions, because it is the easiest technique to interpret, but before doing so, we have run confirmatory logistic regressions for the predictors of voting in 2000, 1997 and 1993. These results show the same variables as important and statistically significant predictors as those appearing in tables 17, 18, and 19. Table 20 has an ordinal dependent variable, and the use of OLS regression with such variables is commonly accepted.

Table 17 Predictors of Voting/Not Voting in 2000 (Multiple Regression)

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
		B	Std. Error	Beta
1.	In what year were you born?	-.008	.001	-.271*
2.	What is the highest level of formal education you have received?	-.02	.005	.090*
3.	Total household income for the year 2001	.01	.04	.062*
4.	Gender	-.008	.019	-.009
5.	Were you born in Canada or outside Canada?	-.05	.028	-.038
6.	Length of residence	.02	.007	.082*
7.	Interest, discussion, civic duty [†]	-.108	.012	-.172*
8.	Vote matters, civic duty [†]	-.123	.012	-.197*
9.	Parties competitive [†]	.002	.012	.004
10.	Inefficacy/cynicism/party negative [†]	.02	.012	.040
11.	Trust, represented [†]	-.03	.012	-.055*
12.	Party support [†]	-.003	.012	.005
13.	Name on list	-.217	.026	-.168*
14.	Contact by parties or candidates in 2000	-.104	.020	-.097*
[†] = factor scores				
* = statistically significant p < .01				
missing data = mean substitution				
R ² = .320				
N = 2 047				

Table 18 Predictors of Voting/Not Voting in 1997 (Multiple Regression)

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
		B	Std. Error	Beta
1.	In what year were you born?	-.007	.001	-.245*
2.	What is the highest level of formal education you have received?	.006	.005	.027
3.	Total household income for the year 2001	.01	.004	.080*
4.	Gender	.03	.018	.041
5.	Were you born in Canada or outside Canada?	-.06	.027	-.047
6.	Length of residence	.01	.007	.065*
7.	Interest, discussion, civic duty [†]	-.132	.012	-.236*
8.	Vote matters, civic duty [†]	-.07	.011	-.135*
9.	Inefficacy/cynicism/party negative [†]	.02	.011	.032
10.	Trust, represented [†]	-.02	.011	-.029
11.	Party support [†]	-.02	.011	-.036
12.	Name on list	-.227	.026	-.186*

[†] = factor scores

* = statistically significant $p < .01$

missing data = mean substitution

$R^2 = .280$

$N = 1\ 844$

Table 19 Predictors of Voting/Not Voting in 1993 (Multiple Regression)

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
		B	Std. Error	Beta
1.	In what year were you born?	-.008	.001	-.295*
2.	What is the highest level of formal education you have received?	.02	.005	.086*
3.	Total household income for the year 2001	.02	.004	.105*
4.	Gender	.00	.018	.000
5.	Were you born in Canada or outside Canada?	-.146	.027	-.120*
6.	Length of residence	.02	.007	.080*
7.	Interest, discussion, civic duty [†]	-.109	.012	-.217*
8.	Vote matters, civic duty [†]	-.06	.011	-.135*
9.	Inefficacy/cynicism/party negative [†]	-.008	.011	-.016
10.	Trust, represented [†]	-.002	.011	.003
11.	Party support [†]	-.02	.011	-.045

[†] = factor scores

* = statistically significant $p < .01$

missing data = mean substitution

$R^2 = .228$

$N = 1\ 588$

Table 20 Predictors of Voting Frequency in Elections of 1993, 1997 and 2000 (Multiple Regression)

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
		B	Std. Error	Beta
1.	In what year were you born?	-.03	.002	-.396*
2.	What is the highest level of formal education you have received?	.04	.013	.066*
3.	Total household income for the year 2001	.05	.011	.105*
4.	Gender	.003	.044	-.001
5.	Were you born in Canada or outside Canada?	-.308	.070	-.081*
6.	Length of residence	.04	.017	.044*
7.	Interest, discussion, civic duty [†]	-.328	.027	-.239*
8.	Vote matters, civic duty [†]	-.253	.026	-.184*
9.	Parties competitive [†]	.02	.026	.020
10.	Inefficacy/cynicism/party negative [†]	.02	.026	.022
11.	Trust, represented [†]	-.05	.026	-.037
12.	Party support [†]	-.05	.026	-.034
13.	Name on list	-.774	.065	-.230*

[†] = factor scores
 * = statistically significant $p < .01$
 missing data = mean substitution
 $R^2 = .489$
 $N = 1\ 600$

The series of regressions reported in tables 17 to 20 uses the predictors of voting or not voting we have developed above, in the 2000 federal election, the 1997 federal election and the 1993 federal election, and a composite index of the frequency of voting of respondents in all three of these elections. The categories of that last variable of voting frequency range from 3, for people who voted in all three, to 0 for those who did not vote in any. Only those respondents who were eligible to vote in all three were included.

There are many similarities among the results of the four regression analyses, allowing us to identify the most important factors in not voting in recent elections. In all four instances, **age** emerges as the number-one predictor of whether someone voted or did not. As measured by the Beta statistic, which standardizes the regression coefficients measuring the change in the dependent variable effected by one unit of change in the independent variable, age is usually a substantially larger coefficient than the second-highest. In Table 20, where the dependent variable is frequency of voting in the three most recent federal elections, its Beta coefficient is $-.396$, while the next factor, the attitudes of interest, discussion and civic duty, is $-.239$. (The minus signs, incidentally, are simply the result of the direction of the coding of the variables. Age is measured by year of birth, which goes from low to high. Frequency of voting goes from 0 to 3. Therefore, the minus sign of the coefficient means that the youngest people (born in the later years) are less likely to have voted.)

As has been mentioned, the two factors involving citizen duty have significant connections to voter turnout. The **interest, discussion, civic duty** factor (#7) is the second most important in predicting voting frequency, and third in 2000. The other related factor, **vote matters, civic duty** (#8), comes in fourth place in predicting voting frequency, is second in 2000, and fourth in 1997 and 1993. The other attitudinal factors derived from the factor analyses (#9–12) do not reach statistical significance, with the exception of the **trust** factor in 2000, which is a weak predictor of voter turnout.

Another predictive factor of importance is the one measuring administrative effects, namely the respondent having his/her **name on the list of electors in 2000**. This factor is fourth in importance in explaining voter turnout in the 2000 election, but also seems to be measuring effects that were important in previous elections. It is actually the second strongest predictor of not voting in the previous election of 1997, as well as third in predicting voting frequency in the three elections. Although it might appear puzzling that not being on the 2000 list is important in explaining not voting in previous elections, it must be remembered that the 2000 list was composed from an enumeration in 1997. Thus, this variable picks up administrative difficulties from a previous time period, and makes it appear that the same people may suffer from them consistently over time.

Some additional factors reach statistical significance in tables 17 to 20. In terms of socio-demographic variables, **higher income** is associated with higher voting frequency, and also with turnout in the specific elections of 1993, 1997 and 2000. **Being new to Canada**, as measured by whether respondents were born in this country or not, is associated with lower turnout. So is **geographical mobility**, as measured by the **length** of residence in one's current neighbourhood or community. Finally, in the 2000 election, where we were able to measure this factor, being **contacted by the parties or candidates** is correlated with higher voter turnout.

In re-running Table 17 for Ontario only, we determined that the order and approximate impact of the significant predictor variables of voter turnout was the same as shown in that table for the country as a whole. Therefore, the fact that Ontario had a lower than average turnout in 2000 was not due to the influence of any unusual factor specific to that province.

4. Political Interest

Table 21 “Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?”

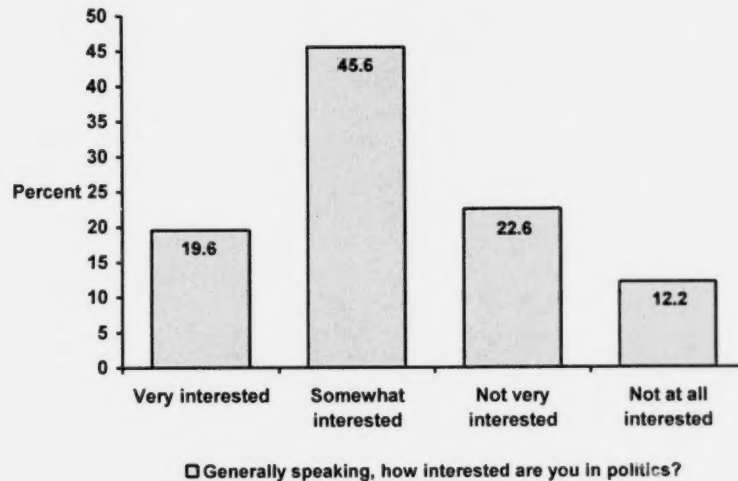
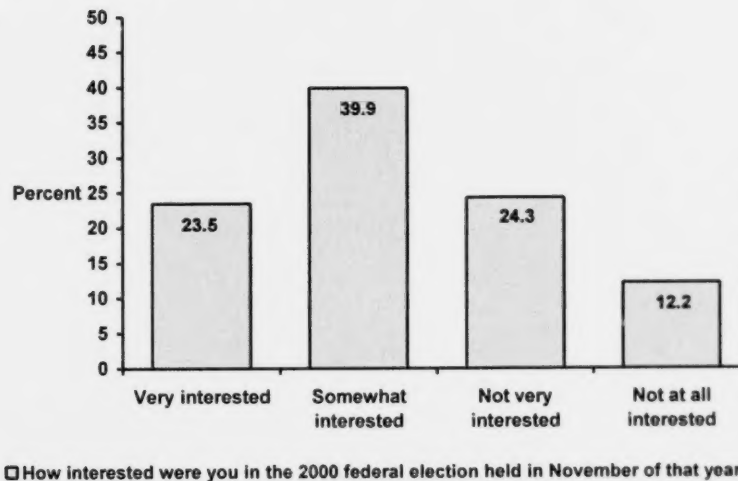


Table 22 “And how interested were you in the 2000 federal election, held in November of that year?”



We have seen above that political interest and civic duty are related to each other, and that they both load on a common factor (Table 15). In the regressions reported in tables 17 to 20, this factor is one of the strongest predictors of voting in the elections since 1993. As we can see from Tables 21 and 22, however, the overall levels of political and election interest in our 2002 survey are not particularly low in absolute terms. As it happens, the political and election interest questions are two that were asked of the entire sample, including the screening interview, and so we have a very large sample size and low margin of error for these two variables (tables 21 and 22). The overall levels of general and election interest are very similar to each other, with a few more people in the "very interested" category on election interest, and correspondingly fewer in the "somewhat interested category".

Political and election interest have been measured in all the Canadian National Election Studies, albeit in different ways. In the early surveys, the scale was a three-point measure of "how much attention" the respondent paid to politics in general "when there is not a big election campaign going on," and a four-point measure of how much attention was paid to the election in question. These surveys, in 1979 and 1984, for instance, show consistently that election interest is higher than general political interest, illustrating the stimulus effect of an election campaign. In those years, about one third of the electorate claimed to be "very interested" in the election, another 40 percent "somewhat interested" and the remainder of just under 30 percent either "slightly interested" or "not interested". General political interest measures show about 40 percent of the electorate admitting they have little or no interest, with the majority of the rest in the "follow politics fairly closely" category, rather than claiming to be very close followers of political news and events. The 2000 Canadian National Election Study measured political and election interest on a 10-point scale, on which the mean for election interest was 6.39 and general political interest 5.47. The 1997 CNES interest levels, also measured on a 10-point scale, were 5.81 for election interest and 5.38 for general political interest. These results are very similar to the overall levels of interest found in the 2002 survey under examination here.

Table 23 Interest in 2000 Election and Politics Generally

	Total	Non-voters only
Interested* in both politics and election	56.3	22.8
Not interested† in either	27.5	54.2
Interested in politics, but not election	9.0	18.4
Interested in election, but not in politics	7.2	4.5
N =	5 544	1 083
* = "very" or "fairly" interested		
† = "not very" or "not at all" interested		

Table 23 summarizes the national picture of political and election interest. It shows that over half (56.3 percent) of the electorate claims to have been reasonably interested (at least "fairly") in both politics in general and the 2000 election. A group of over a quarter of the citizens (27.5 percent) has low interest in both. The remaining figures are the 9 percent who were interested in politics but not in the election, and the 7 percent who had the reverse pattern of attitudes.

The picture changes substantially, however, when we isolate the interest levels of those respondents who did not vote in 2000. Over half of this group (54.2 percent) says they were not interested in either politics generally or the election specifically. A further 18.4 percent were interested in politics but not in the election, an indicator perhaps that the specific aspects of the election, perhaps the perceived non-competitive situation, led some people to consider that paying attention to the election campaign, and participating themselves, would not be worthwhile. In Table 23, the most intriguing is that group of people who were interested in politics and the election, but who did not vote, despite that interest. Table 24 takes a closer look at the reasons they gave for not voting.

**Table 24 Main Reasons for Not Voting of Those Interested in Politics and the Election
(First response only)**

	Percent
Lack of interest	
Not interested; didn't care; apathy	6.9
Vote meaningless; doesn't count; election foregone conclusion	7.3
Forgot; unaware	1.9
	16.1
Negativity	
No appealing candidates/parties/issues	16.7
Lack of faith/confidence in candidates/parties/leaders	7.2
Lack of information about candidates/parties/issues	4.1
	28.0
Personal/Administrative	
Too busy with work/school/family	19.2
Away from riding/province/country	13.2
Registration problems	7.9
Illness, health issues	3.4
Didn't know where or when; polling station problems	6.3
Moving-related problems	1.9
	51.9
Other	
Religious reasons	0.6
Other; unclassifiable; unclear; none	3.2
	3.8
N = 317	

Quite a different distribution of reasons for not voting appears to be important for this group of people than we saw for the total set of non-voters in Table 12. A return glance at that table shows a virtual 3-way split between reasons of lack of interest, reasons of negativity towards the parties, candidates, issues, etc., and personal or administrative reasons for not voting. Of course, since we have isolated the interested non-voters in Table 24, we would expect that category of reason to drop off, as indeed it does. Only 16.1 percent mention reasons we have classified in this category at all, and more of these were in the "vote would be meaningless" subcategory than simple statements of lack of interest. Most interesting, however, is that the number of people

citing reasons of negativity toward the institutions and personnel of the political system does not increase. Rather, the number of people giving a first reason for not voting in the personal/administrative category rises to over half of the total. This group of people was more likely to report being too busy, or away from home, or to have had registration problems, or not to know the details of where or when to vote. We will return to the issue of the impact of administrative factors on not voting later in this report, but we can note here that there may be potential for involving some of these interested non-voters in future elections.

Table 25 Current Interest Relative to 10 Years Earlier

	Percent
A lot more interested in politics now than ten years ago	17.5
A little more interested in politics now than ten years ago	18.4
About the same level of interest	37.5
A little less interested now than ten years ago	12.0
A lot less interested now than you were ten years ago	16.4
N = 1 520	

We asked respondents born before 1974, who would have had a chance to participate in federal elections since 1993, to "Try to picture yourself ten years ago" and then tell the interviewers whether they felt their interest in politics had grown, lessened or remained the same since then. Table 25 shows that, overall, more people reported an increased interest in politics over the period. This development is to be expected, since we know that interest and participation are lowest in the youngest age groups (see previous section) and grow over time. However, there is a significant group (28.4 percent of those aged 28 or older) that reports decreased interest in politics; and more of these report they are "a lot less interested now than ... ten years ago" (16.4 percent) than just "a little less interested" (12 percent). When demographic variables are correlated with this "change in interest" variable, it appears that women, and those with higher income, are more likely to have increased their interest in politics over the past 10 years, as are those who have stayed in the same place of residence longer. None of these correlates is strong, however.

Table 26 Reasons for Greater Interest in Politics (Open-ended; multiple responses; percentage of respondents)

	Percent
Personal Development	
Older	35.9
Politics has greater meaning now	15.2
Greater awareness; education	14.3
More time now	8.2
Concerned for future/younger generation	5.8
Saw opportunity to contribute; participate	5.7
	85.1
Increased Policy Concerns	
General increase in policy concerns; more policy impact	7.9
Social policy	7.9
Economic policy; economy	6.4
Foreign policy	0.7
	22.9
Political Developments	
Don't like developments; government	9.7
Support developments; changes; government	2.5
Other political	1.8
	14.0
Other; unclear	3.2
N = 535	

Table 27 Reasons for Lower Interest in Politics (Open-ended; multiple responses; percentage of respondents)

	Percent
Political Attitudes	
Negative attitudes to politicians (false promises; dishonesty; selfishness; immaturity; non-professional; corruption)	19.3
Voting does not matter; has no effect; makes no difference	17.7
Lack of confidence/faith in conditions/parties/government	14.5
Political parties all the same; no choices	9.4
Lack of party competition; problems with parties	9.3
Don't relate to the issues/party programs	8.0
Public interest being neglected	7.7
Don't like leaders	2.2
Regional discontent	2.1
	90.2
Personal Reasons	
Too busy; other priorities	12.5
Apathetic; uninterested	7.9
Disillusioned; cynical	4.9
	25.3
Other; unclear	4.3
N = 419	

A main reason for questioning the sample about their rising or declining political interest over the last 10 years was to ask those who reported a change an open-ended follow-up question about the reasons for this. The responses are presented in tables 26 and 27. The reasons for rise or decline in interest are dramatically different. For the group (Table 26) reporting an increase in political interest over the years; **personal development** is the main reason. People report that simply getting older has made them take an interest. Politics has taken on greater meaning with a new status as homeowner, taxpayer, new parent, or member of the workforce. Some people cited the effects of education. Others simply noted that they had more time to take an interest in politics. Other personal reasons given were a developed concern for the future, either for themselves or for the younger generation. Some saw greater opportunities than previously for making a contribution to society, or had participated in politics and found it stimulated interest. Other reasons given for increased interest in politics are related to a raised consciousness about policy matters in a variety of areas, or a sensitivity to political developments, primarily ones the respondent did not favour. These reasons for development of political interest are exactly what would be predicted with political socialization over the life cycle.

Consider the contrast of these personal reasons for developing political interest with the ones given by those who report a lessening of political interest in the last 10 years (Table 27). Here, most respondents give reasons related to **political attitudes** for this change. Leading the way are negative attitudes toward politicians, their false promises, dishonesty, selfishness, immaturity, unprofessional conduct, and corruption. A number of other categories in this table are in a similar vein, citing a lack of faith or confidence in the candidates, parties and government, or a distaste for the leaders. A second underlying theme of these answers has to do with the

meaninglessness of voting. Respondents here mentioned that voting has no effect or makes no difference. It just does not matter; the political parties are all the same or they are not competitive. The issues or party programs do not connect with some of these non-voters. These reasons are indicative of a general malaise among a quarter of the population about those conducting modern Canadian politics. As with the previous group whose interest had increased, there is a minority category of those having personal reasons for a lessening interest. Here, the "too busy" response is paramount, with people citing other priorities in terms of work or family obligations.

Table 28 "What might happen in the next few years to make you more interested in politics?" (open-ended; multiple responses)

	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of less interested	Percentage of 2000 non-voters
Political System Changes			
New candidates	12.7	12.5	11.9
New parties/platforms	10.9	12.2	7.4
New leaders	7.2	7.9	5.3
More competition/choice/stronger opposition	6.8	6.7	3.3
New government	3.7	3.3	1.8
Election/electoral system change	3.2	3.3	3.1
	44.5	45.9	32.8
Politicians' Behaviour Changes			
More honesty; responsibility; accountability	10.6	12.0	11.3
More contact with electorate	6.4	7.9	7.5
Change in attitude	6.4	8.9	7.0
More results; change in direction	2.6	1.4	2.1
	26.0	30.2	27.9
Policy-related Changes			
More attention to social policy	11.1	10.6	10.9
More attention to economic policy	6.6	8.2	6.1
New/better issues; other policies	6.3	6.0	7.1
More attention to foreign policy	1.1	0.3	1.2
	25.1	25.1	25.3
Personal Changes			
Gain more information	7.1	2.7	10.0
Age; time; personal development	4.7	1.7	5.0
More concern; interest	2.2	1.1	2.6
	14.0	5.5	17.6
Other			
A major national crisis	1.3	0.5	1.5
Other; unclassifiable	3.0	2.7	3.5
	4.3	3.2	5.0
Nothing/don't know	9.6	11.2	13.1
N =	1 869	449	899

What, if anything, might revive interest in politics? We followed by asking just that question: "What might happen in the next few years to make you more interested in politics?" of all the respondents. Table 28 presents a summary of the results, for the total sample of respondents and then two subgroups, those who had said they were now less interested in politics than they had been 10 years previously, and finally those who did not vote in 2000. We may first note, at the bottom of the table, that fewer than 10 percent (9.6 percent) of the total group said "nothing" could make them *more* interested, and in addition some of these people were already quite interested. We can conclude, at least from this evidence, that there are not a lot of Canadians who have become so alienated from the world of politics that they cannot see any way in which their interest can increase. And increased interest in politics would doubtlessly lead to a renewed interest in voting when future opportunities arise.

The changes that might improve political interest in future are summarized in Table 28 under the headings of **Political System Changes**; **Politicians' Behaviour Changes**; **Policy-Related Changes**; and **Personal Changes**. The most prominent are the first named – **Political System Changes**. An infusion of "new blood", in the form of new candidates for office, new leaders, and new or renewed political parties, and new party platforms would go a long way toward sparking new interest, says the public. A more competitive political situation would help as well, in the form of a stronger opposition or more evenly matched electoral races. Finally, a small number of Canadians advocated electoral reform, either in the sense of a new electoral system, or other changes to the voting laws. Overall, close to half of both the total, and the "less interested than ten years ago", cited some development in this **political system change** category which would boost their interest in politics, and one third of non-voters in 2000 did the same. Since current political events make it certain that there will be many new political leaders at the time of the next federal election, and likely that there will be a host of new candidates running at the local level, taking people at their word indicates that interest in a 2004/5 election should be greater than it was in 2000, which might result in a slight rebound in the voting rate.

The other possible changes cited by people in Table 28 are somewhat more problematic in their likely effect. Around over a quarter of the respondents called for politicians' **behaviour** to change, in the direction of greater honesty, responsibility, accountability, attentiveness, etc. These attitudes are no doubt more a product of general cynicism and negativism on the part of the public than a result of actual action or inaction on the part of elected officials, most of whom are doing their best to be accountable, attentive, honest, responsible, etc., already. Similarly, the proposed **policy-related changes** cited in the next category of responses would likely provoke the rejoinder from politicians that much of their activity already relates to policies in the areas cited by the public as needing "more attention." Greater concern for **social policy** leads the way in the list, but the "health policy" issue was already the most prominent issue in the 2000 election, when the interest and voter turnout were low. Still, there will be renewed attention to health policy issues in the next few years with the release of the Royal Commission report, and the new party leaders and candidates for leadership may espouse new ideas in this field, and energize public interest in policy. Finally, a number of people responded to the question in a different way, citing things that might change in their own lives to permit them to take a greater interest in politics. The most prominent of these was gaining more information or education about political subjects, but some people also felt that gaining time or years of age would bring greater opportunity for political involvement.

The general patterns of response in Table 28 are for the most part mirrored in the responses of the subgroups who had declined in interest over the last decade, or who did not vote in 2000. One difference of note, however, involves the non-voters of 2000, who were less likely to give responses in the **political system change** category than those who voted in that election. This difference is substantial. Since this group of non-voters is the one of immediate concern in this report, the result indicates that we must temper our conclusion above that the upcoming personnel changes in Canadian political leaders and candidates will increase public interest and future participation with the knowledge that this key group is less likely than average to be affected by these changes.

5. Civic Duty

Civic duty is the feeling that participation is to be valued for its own sake, or for its contribution to the overall health of the polity, and does not need to be justified on instrumental grounds. For the believer in the importance of participating out of duty, neither is it important that the elector be enticed to cast a ballot by a particularly attractive bevy of candidates, parties, or policies, nor is it essential that the race be close and the vote more likely to "count" in determining the outcome. Rather, the conscientious voter motivated by civic duty feels that voting is important for its own sake.

Table 29 Civic Duty by Vote in the 2000 Federal Election (Column percentages)

		Total	Voters in 2000	Non-voters in 2000	IRPP 2000
In your view, how important is it that people vote in elections?	Essential	36.2	55.9	19.2	41
	Very important	37.6	37.9	37.3	43
	Somewhat important	20.5	5.4	33.6	12
	Not at all important	5.7	0.8	9.9	3
			V = .475 (p < .000)		N = 1 278
			N = 2 029		

Conceptualized in these terms, a sense of civic duty may be measured by the question reported in Table 29, "In your view, how important is it that people vote in elections?" with the alternatives starting at "essential" and working their way down to "not at all important". The question was worded with these alternatives to compare with a question asked in the IRPP survey of 2000 (Paul Howe and David Northrup, "Strengthening Canadian Democracy", *Policy Matters*, July 2000, Institute for Research on Public Policy, Montreal, p. 25). Unfortunately, the question is not strictly comparable, since the last alternative was worded "Not at all important" in the current survey, whereas the IRPP worded theirs "Not all that important". Even with this change, we have presented the comparative data in Table 29, and we conclude that the perceived importance of voting in 2002 is similar to 2000, since the 2002 survey contains half non-voters, and non-voters are less likely to think voting is important. The IRPP survey contained no oversample of non-voters.

The overall results in Table 29 show that a strong majority of Canadians thinks voting in elections is either "essential" or "very important". Only about a quarter of the total sample in our study gives it a "somewhat important" or "not important" rating. The breakdown offered in the table, however, shows that there is a strong relationship between having an attitude of civic duty and having voted in the 2000 election. Among voters, almost everybody thinks it is at least "very important" if not "essential", whereas non-voters show a much lower level of civic duty. We have already seen in tables 17 to 20 that the two factors (7 and 8 in the tables) involving the civic duty measure are among the leading predictors of having voted in recent elections.

Table 30 Predictors of Civic Duty (Multiple Regression)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
In what year were you born?	.01	.002	.215*
What is the highest level of formal education you have received?	-.04	.014	-.099*
Total household income for the year 2001	-.02	.011	-.064*
Gender	-.09	.048	-.054
Were you born in Canada or outside Canada?	.03	.078	.012
Length of residence	-.006	.018	-.010
Inefficacy/cynicism/party negative [†]	-.09	.024	-.106*
Trust, represented [†]	.107	.025	.119*
Party support [†]	.207	.025	.227*
Active participation [†]	.161	.026	.180*
Passive participation [†]	.08	.023	.101*
[†] = factor scores			
* = statistically significant $p < .01$			
$R^2 = .216$			
$N = 1\ 108$			

What factors might be related to having a sense of civic duty? When we turn the analysis around and designate civic duty as the dependent variable, the item to be explained, we see the results in Table 30. In choosing what to enter into this regression, we avoided putting in variables, such as political interest, which form part of the civic duty factors themselves (Table 15). However, we did use the efficacy, trust and party support factors (Table 16), which show themselves to be significant predictors of civic duty in Table 30. In particular, positive feelings about the ability of political parties to “represent people’s interests”, “provide good plans for new policies”, and “discuss issues that really are of interest to voters” provide the strongest predictor of civic duty (Beta = .227*). The factors representing feelings of political trust, and political efficacy, are also important to lesser degrees. Among the socio-demographic variables, greater age heightens civic duty, suggesting that it grows with time, as does higher education, suggesting it grows with knowledge.

6. Effectiveness of the Vote and Competitiveness of Political Parties

At earlier points in this report, we have seen the results of measures of these two related concepts. The factor analysis in Table 15 showed that opinions about the degree of competitiveness of the political parties in the country as a whole, and in the respondent's electoral district were closely related (they formed factor 3). Similarly, respondent opinions as to whether "your vote would make a difference" in the country as a whole or in the particular electoral district form the major part of factor 2. In the ensuing regressions, these two factors were used as predictors of voting/not voting in recent elections (tables 17–20). There, feeling that the vote mattered (combined in the factor with "civic duty") was a statistically significant predictor of having voted, but the rating of the competitiveness of political parties was not.

It is useful to examine these items a little more closely here, since they capture the way the political situation in Canada was rated by Canadians at the time of the 2000 election. It has been pointed out by many observers that the "regional dominance" of certain parties creates an overall impression of non-competitiveness nationwide. In addition, there are a large number of ridings in all parts of the country where the gap between the first- and second-place finishers is substantial enough that potential voters might not have felt their vote would count for much in deciding the outcome. Of course, those with high levels of political interest or "civic duty" were likely to cast a ballot regardless of the competitive situation at the time, but voters with more marginal feelings may have felt that there wasn't much point to it.

Table 31 "Did your vote make a difference in the country?" (percentages)

	Voted in 2000?		Total
	Yes	No	
A lot	14.4	7.0	10.4
Some	22.7	18.9	20.6
A little	34.9	33.4	34.1
None	28.0	40.8	34.9
	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .116 p < .000			

Table 32 "Did your vote make a difference in the riding?" (percentages)

	Voted in 2000?		Total
	Yes	No	
A lot	23.1	10.1	16.2
Some	32.3	22.9	27.3
A little	26.1	34.4	30.5
None	18.5	32.7	26.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .243 p < .000			

Table 33 "Were parties competitive in the country?" (percentages)

	Voted in 2000?		Total
	Yes	No	
Very competitive	21.2	20.5	20.8
Somewhat competitive	39.5	42.8	41.2
Not very competitive	29.1	20.9	24.8
Not at all competitive	10.3	15.9	13.2
	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .116 p < .000			

Table 34 "Were parties competitive in the riding?" (percentages)

	Voted in 2000?		Total
	Yes	No	
Very competitive	16.6	14.7	15.7
Somewhat competitive	40.9	41.7	41.3
Not very competitive	31.4	25.4	28.3
Not at all competitive	11.1	18.2	14.7
	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .111 p < .000			

Tables 31 and 32 show that a substantial majority of the sampled respondents believed their vote would make little or no difference in either the country as a whole, or their own electoral district. This feeling that their vote would not matter was stronger in the larger arena of the whole country, as we might expect given the large number of votes involved. More telling, perhaps, are the figures for the respondent's own riding. Here, the feeling that their vote would make no difference is particularly strong in those who did not vote (Table 32). The table shows that two thirds of non-voters felt their votes would make little or no difference in their local constituency contest, as opposed to less than half (44.6 percent) of those who voted who felt this way. In some ways, it is a testament to Canadians' feelings of civic duty that so many people voted despite feeling their vote would have little chance of making a difference in the outcome.

While we have seen that, overall, many in the public feel that their votes would not make much difference in the outcome, this opinion is not generally matched by negative judgments about party competitiveness. Tables 33 and 34 show that substantial majorities, even of non-voters, felt that the parties were competitive, although more people were likely to choose the alternative "somewhat competitive" rather than "very competitive". The meaning of "somewhat competitive" is open to speculation; it may not indicate a particularly high level of perceived party competition.

A further exploration was undertaken of potential correlates of these attitudes (data not shown). In the case of both feelings about the effectiveness of the vote and feelings about the competitive level of the parties, the main significant predictors were the factor scores measuring attitudes of inefficacy, trust and party support (see tables 17–20, predictors 10–12). We already know these factors are intercorrelated, so this finding does not add appreciably to our knowledge at this point.

7. Social Capital

Social capital is an umbrella term describing a variety of measures of active participation in the life of the community, as well as attitudes of support for the greater good of that community rather than simply individual gain. As such it is worth investigating here to explore the place of voting in the general mix of other participatory activities. It is sometimes suggested that voting as a political act may not be of as much importance to people as in the past because other activities have emerged to engage their attention; in other words, non-voters may be engaged in other, more relevant political activities. On the other hand, a more skeptical view would expect non-voters to be similarly less active when it comes to other participatory activities and attitudes.

A lengthy exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this report, but we can take an initial look at the plausibility of the two positions outlined above by simply observing how the voters and non-voters in our sample differ on other participatory activities and attitudes. Since there are several batteries of questions involved, the four tables in this section provide a comparison of means rather than percentage figures in order to display the information in summary form.

Table 35 measures actual group membership in a variety of organizations on a scale of 1 to 3: those answering 1 actively belonged to the group, 2 belong but are not active and 3 do not belong. On this measure, the participation levels of most people are rather low. However, in the case of each group mentioned, those who voted in 2000 are more likely to be members than those who did not.

The same general result is apparent from Table 36, which gives mean scores (this time out of 4) on engagement in a variety of participatory activities. The question asked whether respondents had actually participated in any of the activities in the past year, in the more distant past, whether they might do it, or would never do it. We have seen these activities before in Table 30, summarized as "active" and "passive" participation; they are looked at separately in Table 36. Regardless of their active (petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, meetings) or passive (letters, calls, Internet) nature, voters are clearly more likely to say they would engage in these acts than non-voters.

Once again, when general media consumption is investigated, in Table 37, the voters are more active. They are more likely to read newspapers, listen to news or current events shows on the radio, watch the news on television, and surf the Internet for information than are non-voters. Sometimes these differences are very small (for example, Internet use) and sometimes they are larger (newspapers), but the consistency of the results leaves little doubt that those people who did not vote in the 2000 election are less likely to be active in other forms of participation.

To the extent, then, that many participatory acts and group memberships contribute to social capital, non-voters are making less of an overall contribution than voters. Non-voters are not making up for their lack of electoral participation by substituting other "more relevant" political activities. Rather, they are distancing themselves from the public sphere in many ways. Furthermore, Table 38 shows that they are distancing themselves psychologically from all of the territorially based units of Canadian society. When asked how close they feel to a variety of places, voters feel closer to their neighbourhoods, their towns or cities, their provinces, their

country, their continent, and also to the country their ancestors come from. Voting, then, is part of psychological and behavioural involvement with the community. To the extent people are declining the opportunities to vote in Canada, they are also illustrating a lowered commitment to the Canadian community.

Table 35 Level of Participation

Did you vote in the last federal election in 2000?		A political party or association	A trade union or professional association	A church or other religious organization	A sports group, hobby or leisure club	A charitable organization or service club	A neighbourhood association or group	Artistic, musical or cultural groups
Yes	Mean/3	2.79	2.38	2.15	2.15	2.37	2.55	2.61
	Std. Deviation	0.51	0.84	0.88	0.95	0.87	0.77	0.74
No	Mean/3	2.93	2.53	2.46	2.30	2.59	2.71	2.70
	Std. Deviation	0.28	0.78	0.78	0.91	0.75	0.64	0.67
Total	Mean/3	2.87	2.46	2.32	2.23	2.49	2.64	2.66
	Std. Deviation	0.41	0.81	0.84	0.93	0.82	0.71	0.71

Participation level 1 "high", 3 "low" – see text.

Table 36 Participatory Actions Undertaken

Did you vote in the last federal election in 2000?		Sign a petition	Join in a boycott	Attend a demonstration	Write a letter to a newspaper	Call-in to a talk show	Attend a political meeting or rally	Join in a politics-related Internet discussion or chat group
Yes	Mean/4	1.83	3.14	3.13	2.99	3.48	2.75	3.60
	Std. Deviation	0.91	0.92	0.99	0.91	0.83	1.02	0.75
No	Mean/4	2.06	3.39	3.22	3.14	3.58	3.28	3.65
	Std. Deviation	0.99	0.82	0.90	0.86	0.72	0.88	0.69
Total	Mean/4	1.95	3.28	3.18	3.07	3.54	3.04	3.62
	Std. Deviation	0.96	0.87	0.94	0.89	0.78	0.98	0.72

Participation level 1 "high", 4 "low" – see text.

Table 37 Frequency of Activity

Did you vote in the last federal election in 2000?		Surf the Internet for information	Watch the news on television	Listen to news or current events shows on the radio	Read newspapers
Yes	Mean/4	2.47	1.38	1.63	1.68
	Std. Deviation	1.19	0.73	0.99	0.89
No	Mean/4	2.51	1.70	1.95	2.05
	Std. Deviation	1.19	0.90	1.11	0.98
Total	Mean/4	2.49	1.55	1.80	1.88
	Std. Deviation	1.19	0.84	1.07	0.96

Participation level 1 "high", 4 "low" – see text.

Table 38 Closeness of Feeling Towards

Did you vote in the last federal election in 2000?		Your neighbourhood	Your town/city	Your province	Canada	North America	The country your ancestors came from
Yes	Mean/4	1.85	1.86	1.94	1.74	2.22	2.48
	Std. Deviation	0.82	0.79	0.82	0.90	0.91	1.07
No	Mean/4	2.24	2.24	2.28	2.09	2.49	2.66
	Std. Deviation	0.96	0.95	0.94	1.01	1.00	1.11
Total	Mean/4	2.06	2.06	2.12	1.92	2.36	2.58
	Std. Deviation	0.92	0.90	0.91	0.98	0.97	1.10

Closeness level 1 "very close", 4 "not close" – see text.

8. Electoral Reform

Three questions in the survey investigated attitudes toward electoral reform. One hypothesis to explain some of the decline in electoral participation is that the population has become disenchanted with the first-past-the-post electoral system, since that system can create situations where certain parties are not able to win the number of seats in Parliament commensurate with the percentage of votes they receive. Advocates of proportional representation electoral systems argue that such systems give a more accurate picture of support for political parties in the legislature. They thus maintain the interest and involvement of the population by giving fair representation, and by providing hope that smaller parties can elect members even though they have no hope of forming a government by themselves.

Table 39 Satisfaction with Present Electoral System, by Vote in 2000 (percentages)

	Voted in 2000?		Total
	Yes	No	
Very satisfied	32.8	24.9	28.7
Somewhat satisfied	47.9	55.5	51.9
Somewhat dissatisfied	12.3	12.8	12.6
Very dissatisfied	7.0	6.7	6.9
	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .091 p < .001			

Table 40 Support for Introduction of Proportional Representation by Vote in 2000 (percentages)

	Voted in 2000?		Total
	Yes	No	
Very supportive	29.0	20.5	24.5
Somewhat supportive	42.4	50.8	46.9
Somewhat opposed	17.7	19.5	18.7
Very opposed	10.9	9.2	10.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .110 p < .000			

Table 41 Support for Compulsory Voting, by Vote in 2000 (percentages)

	Voted in 2000?		Total
	Yes	No	
Very supportive	22.3	11.9	16.7
Somewhat supportive	25.5	20.5	22.8
Somewhat opposed	22.0	23.9	23.0
Very opposed	30.2	43.7	37.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .177 p < .000			

Table 39 shows the answers when people were asked whether they were generally satisfied with the present Canadian electoral system. The question was preceded by a short preamble, which explained that, in Canadian federal elections, "people vote in an electoral district, and the candidate with the most votes wins." This wording ensured that people focused on the operations of the current electoral system when answering the question. The results show that there is only a fairly small minority (less than 20 percent) that expresses dissatisfaction with the current system. The bulk of the population expresses itself as "somewhat satisfied". Those who voted in 2000 are somewhat more likely to declare themselves "very satisfied" than those who did not. Non-voters are no more likely than voters to be dissatisfied with the current electoral system.

Satisfaction with the plurality electoral system, however, does not mean rejection of its main alternative. Table 40 shows that a quarter of Canadians are "very supportive" of introducing a proportional representation (PR) system for Canadian federal elections, and another group of almost half the sample (46.9 percent) is "somewhat supportive" of bringing in PR. (These calculations leave aside a group of about 10 percent of the study who said they did not know, or that they didn't want either this one or the current one, or that "it depends." Such a degree of indecision is not unusual when introduction of an unfamiliar institution is proposed.)

The pattern of answers to these two questions suggests that the public does not want to dispense with the current plurality electoral system, but at the same time is interested in exploring elements of a proportional representation system. This might result in support for a "mixed" electoral system, as practised in Germany or New Zealand, since such a system allows some of the members of the legislature to be elected under plurality from constituencies, and some by PR. However, support for such a system, or other variants, was not explored directly in this study.

Another reform of electoral law, which has been suggested to remedy the turnout decline, is the introduction of compulsory voting. Such a law, in force in Australia, Belgium, Brazil and elsewhere levies a fine if citizens do not cast a ballot. When Canadian respondents were asked if they favoured such a law, Table 41 shows that it was not very popular. A majority would be opposed, often strongly opposed, to compulsory voting. Understandably, the non-voters of 2000 are more opposed to this than the voters.

We investigated, through multiple regression analysis, the possibility that the predictor variables we have been using (for example, in Table 20) could relate in an important way to support for these electoral reforms (data not shown). In general, the relationships are weak, and very little variance is explained. For example, the package of predictors used in many of the regressions in this report explains only 2 percent of the variance in who supports the introduction of PR. There are a few weak patterns: PR is more favoured by those born outside Canada, women, people with higher incomes, and those who have low degrees of political efficacy.

9. Youth and Education

We have noted frequently in this report the connection of age with not voting. Table 14, for example, showed that recent cohorts of young electors participated at particularly low levels in recent federal elections. Age was the strongest predictor of voting in tables 17–20, when a wide variety of factors was examined. Age is also an important predictor of the development of a feeling of civic duty (Table 30). And a wide variety of additional age effects on other variables will be noted shortly in the upcoming section on age cohorts.

In such a situation, it seems natural to turn our attention directly to the factor of not voting among youth. As part of the survey, we asked an open-ended question of all respondents: “It has often been observed that young people are less likely to vote than older people. Why do you think this is?” The responses to this question (Table 42) fall into two broad categories, those related to the lack of integration of young people into the political system, and those suggesting that the problem lies with basic attitudes of apathy or political distrust held by young people.

Table 42 Perceived Reasons Why Young People Less Likely to Vote (Open-ended; multiple responses)

	Under 25 years old	25 and older
Not Integrated		
Distanced from politics by age; not feeling represented, connected	40.4	36.6
Lack of information, understanding, knowledge	33.9	27.1
Lack of encouragement	2.0	4.2
Too busy, too mobile	3.3	3.2
	79.6	71.1
Disengagement		
Uninterested, apathetic	31.3	30.4
Negativism, cynicism, disillusionment	9.2	13.5
Distrustful of system, politicians	6.7	8.7
Irresponsibility, rebelliousness, laziness	4.3	6.4
	51.5	59.0
Other	1.8	3.5
Do not know	0.0	0.4
N =	386	1 420

Both categories of response were popular public explanations of the lower rate of voting by youth (multiple responses were permitted). It is apparent, however, that most Canadians feel that young people are not voting because they feel distanced from the operations of the political system, or because they lack information about it (Table 42, top two categories). The first explanation, distancing, has answers of the following nature:

- youth do not believe that government represents them or cares about their views, their needs, and their issues
- the age difference distances youth from the political process and the politicians
- political parties do not reach out to them, or are out of touch with youth
- youth feel that politics does not affect them, perhaps because they have not yet developed the responsibilities which are the subject of political issues
- no one listens to young people; they have no voice

Feelings of not being connected with politics such as those mentioned above are cited by over a third of the total sample, but are cited by an even higher number of young people. There is a prevalent feeling, then, that young people lack representation in the current political system. This perception is joined by one that young people simply do not have enough political information. This lack of knowledge relates to all aspects of politics – the candidates, parties and issues. It extends to a lack of knowledge of how the operations of politics might affect their lives. Young people might find politics too difficult, complicated and confusing, adding up to a sense of intimidation that results in indifference.

Explanations for not voting among youth also frequently involved reasons we have classified as “Disengagement”. The bulk of these simply categorized youth as uninterested or apathetic when it comes to casting votes in elections. This image of uncaring youth is sometimes accompanied by a more purposeful description of youth as being actively negative toward politics or elections. Some of the respondents said young people were less likely to vote because they were cynical or disillusioned about politics, sick of the “false promises, dishonesty, hypocrisy, corruption and negativity” which supposedly characterize political life, and not willing to participate in a “meaningless” activity. Young people are also seen by some respondents as lacking trust or faith in candidates, parties, or the government, or simply disliking what is happening (or not happening) in politics. A lower number of respondents were negative about young people, calling them “irresponsible, immature, lazy, rebellious, or lacking in foresight or vision.”

Table 43 "What do you think should be done to get young people to be more interested in politics? (open-ended; multiple responses)

	Under 25 years old	25 and older
Improved Education; Information		
More education in the schools	23.0	23.7
More dialogue/exposure/education (general)	9.0	12.7
More emphasis on personal relevance, benefits, jobs	8.0	10.0
More advertisements, media exposure	7.7	4.1
More education in the home	0.0	2.3
	47.7	52.8
Political System Change; Involvement		
More relevant issues to youth	26.7	14.7
Recruitment, involvement of youth	7.3	10.5
Younger candidates, politicians, leaders	4.7	7.0
Better politicians, leaders, parties	2.3	4.3
Electoral reform; democratic reform	1.7	2.3
	42.7	38.8
Changes in Conduct of Politics		
Government relate better to, understand youth	10.6	14.1
More honesty, responsibility, accountability in politics	6.1	10.9
Make politics less complicated, more interesting, fun	7.6	4.7
	24.3	29.7
Other	1.8	1.8
Nothing, do not know	3.2	3.0
N =	332	1 184

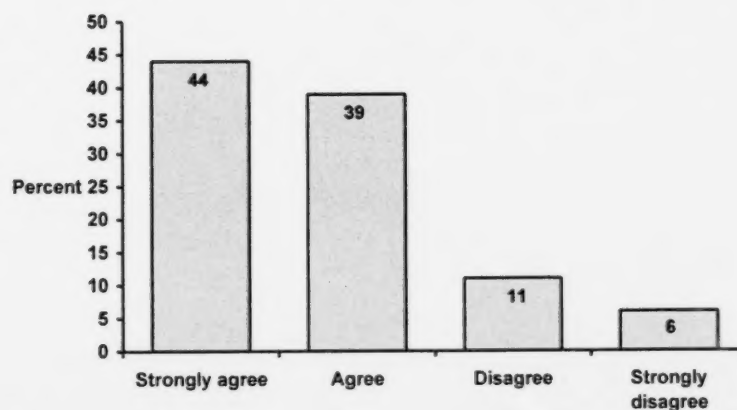
We followed the question about the reasons for lower voting levels among youth with "What do you think should be done to get young people to be more interested in politics?" The answers to this question are shown in Table 43. A majority of people responding mentioned "improved education or information" as a potential solution, an answer that follows logically from the important place the diagnosis of "lack of education" played in the reasons for not voting by youth. Answers in this category, however, were reasonably diverse, dealing not only with the need for more education in the schools but also in the home (one person even mentioned the workplace) and in the media. There was also a realization on the part of some that increased information or education needed to be made relevant to the interests and personal situations of young people, to better engage them.

The notion of increased relevance to young people comes up again in the next category of answers, which referred to changes that might be made to the political system to encourage more involvement of youth. We can see from Table 43 that a substantial number of all respondents felt those responsible for the issue agenda of politics should make more effort to accommodate issues of relevance to young people. These issues could relate to the jobs, education and future of youth. It is interesting also to note that a number of people felt that recruitment or involvement efforts would pay off. Other changes suggested in this category related to the involving effects

that might result from an injection of youth into the personnel of politics; younger leaders, politicians and electoral candidates were cited as beneficial. Some people also mentioned structural change in the form of electoral reform, but this was not heavily emphasized in the answers.

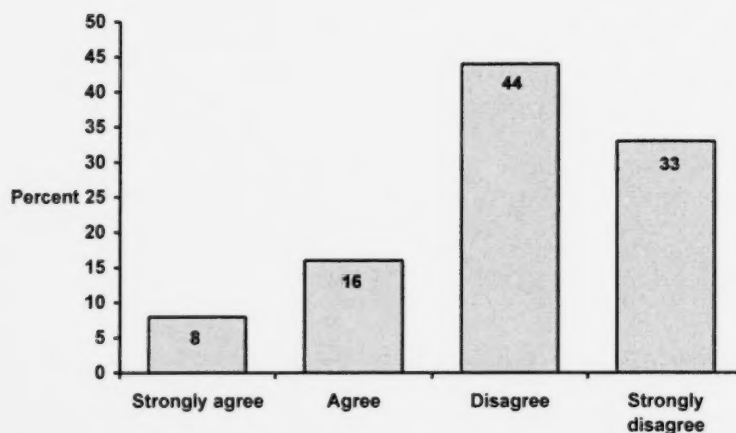
Finally, the theme of greater relevance to youth also comes up as the first entry in the third category from Table 43, that of changes in the actions or conduct of those running the political system. Some of all respondents felt that young people might become more interested in politics if government made an effort to contact and relate to youth, giving them more say in government activities. Other people who referred to changes in the conduct of politics were more likely to cite the need for changes such as more honesty, responsibility and accountability in the actions of politicians.

Table 44 "Schools should do more to educate children in the benefits of voting and political participation"



□ Schools should do more to educate children in the benefits of voting and political participation

Table 45 “The voting age should be lowered to 16 to encourage young people to participate”



□ The voting age should be lowered to 16 to encourage young people to participate

From the list of reasons for, and remedies for, the low political and electoral participation of youth, we may profitably focus on the topic of education. Another question in the survey specifically asked whether people believed that “Schools should do more to educate children in the benefits of voting and political participation.” Table 44 shows that there is overwhelming agreement to this suggestion. Giving more attention to political education in the schools, media, and in the home, would merely reinforce current policy thinking in educational circles, witness the efforts of provincial governments to build more civics training into the secondary school curriculums. Elections Canada already puts considerable effort into a public education campaign, but more could be done.

One additional suggestion we asked about received less public support. When asked if they thought “the voting age should be lowered to 16 to encourage young people to participate”, Table 45 shows that only about one quarter of those surveyed (24 percent) feels that lowering the voting age would be a desirable way of bringing more young people into the political process. Whatever the long-term merits of such an idea, there appears to be a realization that extending the franchise to 16–18 year-olds would initially further decrease the voting rate, and that further education would be needed to pave the way before the majority of the public would be prepared to consider it.

10. The Internet

The possibility of using modern Internet technology to enhance opportunities for voting has intrigued numerous observers. Access to the Internet has spread widely; for example, only about one quarter (26.5 percent) of the current sample reports no access to the Internet either at home, at work, or both (33 percent had access at "both"). Questioning people about their potential Internet use for voting requires adding the proviso that "technology allow enough safety and secrecy", as we did in our questions. It also falls into the realm of the hypothetical, and therefore the results should not be regarded as a totally accurate guide when people are asked about potential usage. Nevertheless, the potential for the Internet to provide additional access to the election process is sufficient to warrant exploration.

We will include a sample calculation about the effect of Internet voting on the overall turnout rate later in this section. Here, we can give the results when people were asked whether they would "likely use the Internet" to:

- Check or modify your personal information or register on the list of electors
- Vote on-line rather than go to cast a ballot at the polling station

Table 46 Likelihood of Using the Internet to Register, by Vote in 2000 (percentages)

		Voted in 2000?		Total
		Yes	No	
Likelihood of using the Internet to check or modify your personal information or register on the list of electors	Very likely	32.5	31.7	32.1
	Somewhat likely	25.7	26.2	26.0
	Not very likely	15.0	15.9	15.5
	Not at all likely	26.8	26.2	26.5
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .015 p < .926				

Table 47 Likelihood of Using the Internet to Vote, by Vote in 2000 (percentages)

		Voted in 2000?		Total
		Yes	No	
Likelihood of using the Internet to vote on-line rather than to cast a ballot at the polling station	Very likely	33.1	43.2	38.5
	Somewhat likely	14.2	17.0	15.7
	Not very likely	14.8	12.0	13.3
	Not at all likely	37.9	27.8	32.5
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .131 p < .000				

As can be seen in tables 46 and 47, a majority of the public, as represented by our sample, declares that it is either "very" or "somewhat" likely that they would use the Internet to register or modify their information on the list of electors and also that they would use the Internet to vote on-line. With regard to the first topic, Internet registration, there is very little difference between those who voted or did not vote in the 2000 general election in their professed likelihood of doing this. Internet voting, on the other hand, is more likely to appeal to current non-voters. We can see from Table 47 that 43.2 percent of non-voters in 2000 claim they would be very likely to vote on-line, and a further 17 percent say they would be somewhat likely to do so. If we are to take these answers at face value, the introduction of Internet registration and Internet voting could have a beneficial effect on raising the turnout rate. Of course, the trick is to estimate how realistic such professed intentions really are.

Table 48 Likelihood of Using the Internet to Vote, by Voting Frequency in Last Three Federal Elections (percentages)

		Voted in none	1	2	Voted in all 3	Total
Likelihood of using the Internet to vote on-line rather than to go cast a ballot at the polling station	Very likely	41.4	57.8	36.8	28.9	36.7
	Somewhat likely	20.5	9.4	18.2	13.3	15.5
	Not very likely	11.3	9.4	13.0	16.2	16.6
	Not at all likely	26.9	23.3	32.0	41.6	34.1
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
V = .133 p < .000						

Table 48 looks, not just at the behaviour of the sample in 2000, but at the voting frequency of our respondents over the last three federal elections (this is the same variable used in Table 20). We can see from this cross-tabulation that those with lower voting frequency in those elections, those who voted either once or not at all, are more likely to say they would vote via the Internet. Even those who voted in two of three were more likely to express the intention of using the Internet than those who voted in every election. It is likely that those Canadians who make a point of voting in every election enjoy doing their civic duty by actually going to the polls, and would be less likely to make use of an Internet alternative. Interestingly, it is the group of people who voted in one of the three opportunities that is most likely to use the Internet to vote. Thus, the Internet might turn out to be a way in which "intermittent" or "transient" voters (see Harold D. Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc and Jon H. Pammett, *Political Choice in Canada and Absent Mandate*, various editions, for a discussion of "transient voters") could improve their participation rates. We know that these are not people who are "permanent non-voters", but rather electors who turn out when they can, or when their interest is piqued. Internet voting might make the difference for some of them.

**Table 49 Predictors of Internet Use for Registration or Voting (multiple regression)
(Betas only)**

Predictors	Likelihood of:	
	Registration	Voting
Age	-.175*	-.167*
Education	.146*	.153*
Income	.121*	.121*
Gender	.048	-.002
Urban-rural residence	.069*	.089*
Born in Canada	.017	.016
Mobility	.055	.004
Name on 2000 list	.032	.008
Active participation [†]	.047	-.007
Passive participation [†]	.145*	.099*
Voting frequency 1993–2000	-.019	.129*
N =	1 294	1 299
	R ² = .150	R ² = .144
† = factor scores		
* = statistically significant p < .01		

Table 49 presents a summary of the predictors of Internet use in a multiple regression format, for conciseness using only the Beta, or standardized regression coefficients. The overall amount of variance explained is modest, about 15 percent in both cases. And the predictor variables associated with “likely” Internet use for registration or voting are quite similar. It is clear that younger, urban respondents, who are more educated and have higher incomes would be more interested in the Internet option. It is well known that these variables also correlate with use of the Internet in general. When it comes to possible Internet registration, the only other statistically significant predictor is having engaged in higher levels of “passive participation” in the past, that is, writing a letter to a newspaper, calling a radio talk show, or joining an Internet chat group. With Internet voting, there is one additional predictor, our “voting frequency” variable from Table 48. Here, the direction of the relationship is such that lower previous voting frequency is associated with higher levels of proposed use of the Internet for voting. This reinforces the relationship observed in the previous table, and shows that lower voting frequency has an effect independent of other variables. Once again, this suggests that some benefit might be gained from the introduction of Internet voting.

To explore the potential impact of the Internet in more detail, we have prepared two calculations regarding the potential contribution of the Internet to reducing two problems of a personal or administrative nature, that of not being on the list of electors and being “busy at work” on polling day. We have already seen, in tables 46–49, responses to the question “If technology allowed enough safety and secrecy” how likely would you be to use the Internet to a) Check or modify your personal information or register on the list of electors and b) Vote on-line rather than to go cast a ballot at a polling station. To the extent that absence from the list might be a deterrent to voting, Internet registration or information modification might alleviate that problem. And to the

extent that busy people might find it difficult to get to the poll, Internet voting could allow them to participate.

Internet registration: To calculate the potential impact of Internet registration, we first cross-tabulated, for non-voters, the importance of the factor of not being on the list of electors by the likelihood of using the Internet to register. We considered those who said it was "very or fairly important" that they were not on the list, and those who said it was "very or fairly likely" that they would use the Internet to register. This calculation produces 130 people (out of an effective weighted non-voter sample of 1 065) or 12.2 percent of non-voters to whom this procedure might be applicable. To put this into terms of the whole electorate, we must multiply our non-voting group by .39 (since this was the percentage who did not vote). The result is 4.76 percent, which is the potential rise in the voting rate with Internet registration.

Before placing too much stock in this figure, we should qualify it in two ways. First, it seems reasonable that some degree of interest in the 2000 election be a necessary condition for someone to go to the trouble of engaging in an Internet registration process. We therefore went back to our 130 potential registrants mentioned above, and retained only those who said they were "very or fairly interested" in the election, removing those who were "not very or not at all interested." This leaves 53 people, which multiplied by .39 equals a potential rise in the voting rate of 1.94 percent with Internet registration.

Finally, we feel that it is also reasonable that only those with Internet access would likely engage in this Internet process. Using the measure in the dataset that reports whether respondents had access to the Internet at home, at work, or both, we found that we were left with 39 people from the above group who had access somewhere. Once again, multiplying by .39, we conclude that the rise in the overall voting rate that might reasonably result from Internet registration would be 1.43 percent. Thus, taking at face value people's expressed opinions that a) not being on the list was an important factor in their decision not to vote, b) that they would have registered by Internet if they could, and qualifying it by whether c) they were interested in the election, and d) they had access to the Internet, we conclude that there would be a small increase in the overall voting rate (we estimate less than one and a half percent) if Internet registration were permitted.

Internet voting: For those non-voters of 2000 who reported that being "busy at work" was an important reason not to cast a ballot (32.9 percent of non-voters, or 12.56 percent of the electorate) we investigated whether they said they would vote via the Internet, if this were possible. Taking those who said this was "very or fairly likely" we identified 238 people, or 21.7 percent of non-voters. Calculating this as a percentage of the total electorate ($21.7 \times .39$) we get an initial total of 8.46 percent, representing the potential rise in voter turnout with Internet voting.

However, as with the previous analysis, it seems reasonable to make the calculation more realistic with a couple of qualifiers. When we sort those 238 people according to their expressed interest in the 2000 election, we find that only 84 of them were "very or fairly interested". Redoing the calculation reduces the potential impact of Internet voting on the overall voting rate to 3.07 percent. Finally, the number reduces further (to 77 people) if we apply the condition that the person have Internet access at a home or work location. When this restriction is made, the

potential rise in the voting rate is 2.82 percent. Thus, taking at face value people's expressed opinion that a) being busy at work was an important factor in their decision not to vote, and b) that they would vote on the Internet if they could, as well as c) that they were interested in the election and d) they had access to the Internet, we conclude that there would be a rise in the overall voting rate of slightly less than 3 percent if Internet voting were implemented. This percentage could be somewhat greater if people from other non-voting categories (i.e. "out of town") not captured by the "busy at work" category are added in.

11. Personal/Administrative Factors

We return at this point in the report to the personal or administrative reasons given for not voting, as identified in the factor analysis in Table 2, and observed in more detail in tables 7-11 and accompanying text. These reasons involved not knowing where or when to vote, not being registered, being ill, away from home or busy at work.

Table 50 Predictors of Likelihood of Voting at the Next Election (Multiple Regression; 2000 Non-voters only)

	Unstandardized B	Standard Error	Beta
Age	-.0002	.002	-.03
Education	-.006	.017	-.12*
Born in Canada	-.140	.103	-.04
Urban-rural	-.003	.025	-.05
Length of residence	.002	.021	.04
Personal/Administrative factors for 2000 non-voters [†]	.330	.032	.32*
Lack of interest factors for 2000 non-voters [†]	-.163	.032	-.16*
$R^2 = .156$			
N = 923			
[†] = factor scores			
* = statistically significant at < .01			

A demonstration of the different character of personal/administrative and lack of interest reasons for not voting may be found in Table 50. This presents the results of a multiple regression analysis with the dependent variable the responses to the question, "How likely are you to vote in the next general election at the federal level?" We have here used the factor scores on the personal/administrative and lack of interest factors from the factor analysis reported in Table 2 as independent, predictor variables of future voting intentions along with a selection of demographic variables. Table 50 shows that those non-voters for whom personal/administrative factors were important in their non-voting behaviour in 2000 are strongly associated with the intention to vote in the future (Beta = .316, $p < .000$). Having lack of interest as a reason for not voting in 2000, however, is associated with the opposite phenomenon, a lower expressed likelihood of voting in the future (Beta = -.156, $p < .000$). The only demographic variable entered into this analysis that achieves statistical significance in predicting the likelihood of voting in the next federal election is higher education (Beta = -.12, $p < .000$). Age, length of residence in the community, birth in Canada, and urban-rural residence are not significant predictors.

This result illustrates that those non-voters in 2000 who report being affected in their decision by what we call “personal/administrative factors” are actually quite unlike those who are not interested in politics or elections. They show every indication of wanting to vote in future, if they are able to overcome what they saw as deterrents in 2000. Any changes in electoral procedures that would allow more convenient registration or voting for this group of current non-voters might well pay dividends in allowing them to enter the active electorate.

Table 51 “Was your name on the list of electors?”

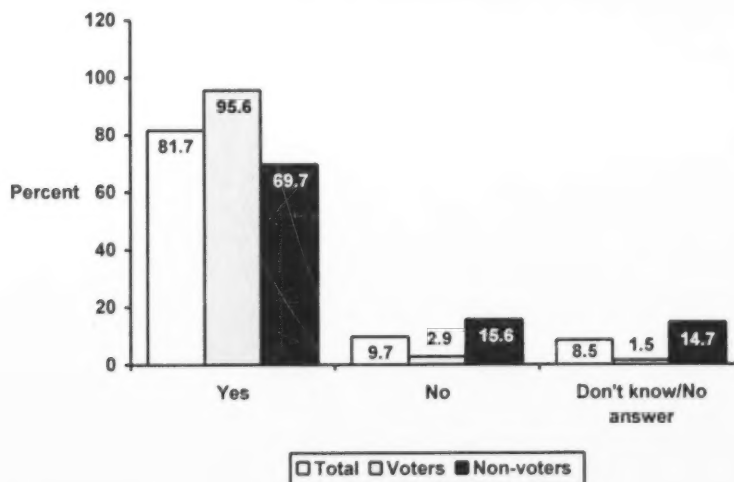


Table 52 “Problem making sure that your name was on the list?”

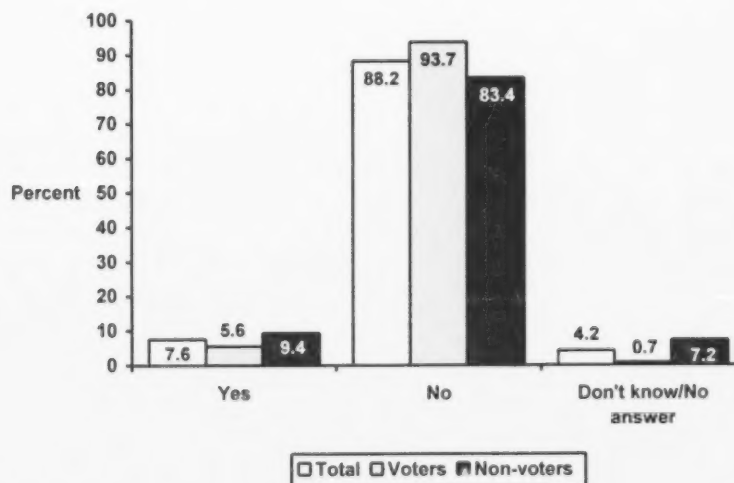


Table 53 "Problem finding out where to vote?"

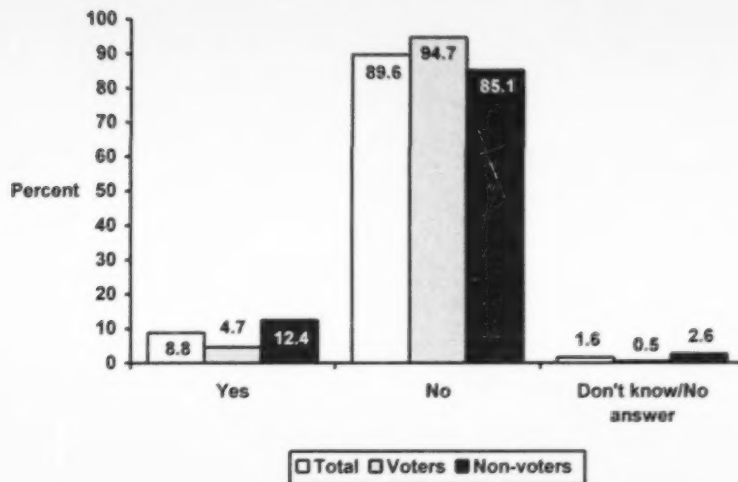


Table 51 further clarifies the coverage of the list of electors prepared for the 2000 federal election. When respondents were directly asked whether their name was on the list, 81.7 percent said yes, 9.7 percent said no and the remaining 8.5 percent did not know. The division of that table into voters and non-voters in the election produces a considerable difference, indicative, no doubt, of the lack of interest of some non-voters in the process. We can see that, of those who ended up not voting in the election, only 69.7 percent knew they were on the list, while 15.6 percent said they were not and 14.7 percent did not know. Only a relatively small number of those who voted in 2000 report not being on the list. It is difficult to interpret with certainty the meaning of that answer, since they all would have ended up on the list eventually if they voted, even if they were added at the poll itself. Presumably, those voters who said they were not on the list meant that they were not originally on the list but had themselves added at some stage.

Tables 52 and 53 show the results when both voters and non-voters were asked whether they encountered problems making sure that their names were on the list of electors and finding out where to vote. Less than 10 percent of the total sample did report such problems, but predictably the eventual non-voters reported them at higher levels, 9.4 percent of non-voters reported a problem making sure their names were on the list, with a further 7.2 percent unsure about that. And 12.4 percent of non-voters reported experiencing a problem finding out where to vote, perhaps reflective of the lack of a voter information card.

To investigate the specific nature of these problems, those who mentioned one in tables 52 and 53 were asked to describe the nature of the problem. These are tabulated in table 54. Multiple responses were permitted.

Table 54 Details of Registration or Voting Problems

	Percentage of respondents*
Not registered; not on list	23.2
Difficulty finding where/when to vote	21.8
Problems with polling station	7.3
Away from riding	5.9
Too busy	3.6
Moving/recently moved	10.9
Lack of interest, information (not administrative)	17.2
Political problems (not administrative)	5.5
Other	3.6
N = 220	
* multiple responses permitted	

Table 54 summarizes the particular problems mentioned by about one fifth of the non-voters in the study. Those who had registration difficulties said that they had to undertake an inquiry or an effort to get themselves registered, or to correct information that was incorrect. Some did not receive a voter information card, and some had difficulty finding out how or where to correct the information. A few people complained that no one came to their house to register them. For those with difficulties in the second category, most did not know the location of their polling station. For some, distance to the station, or accessibility, were problems. A few people felt they were being given a run-around by being sent to another poll. As for the other categories of a personal or administrative nature, problems with being away from the riding, too busy, or having recently moved are all situations we have met before in replies to our questions.

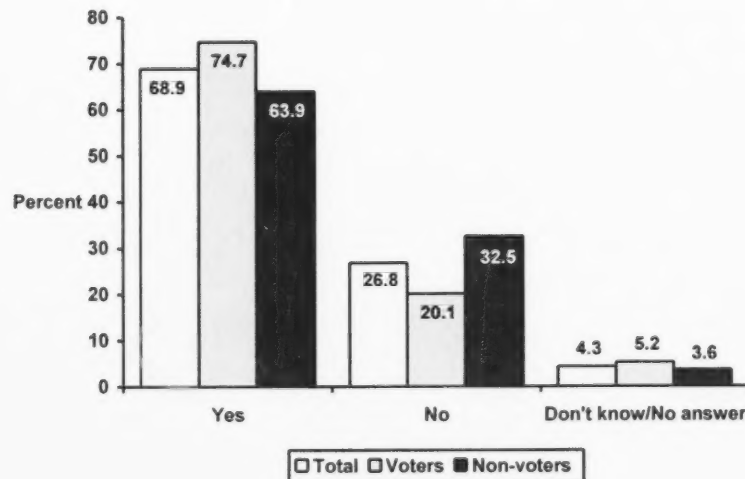
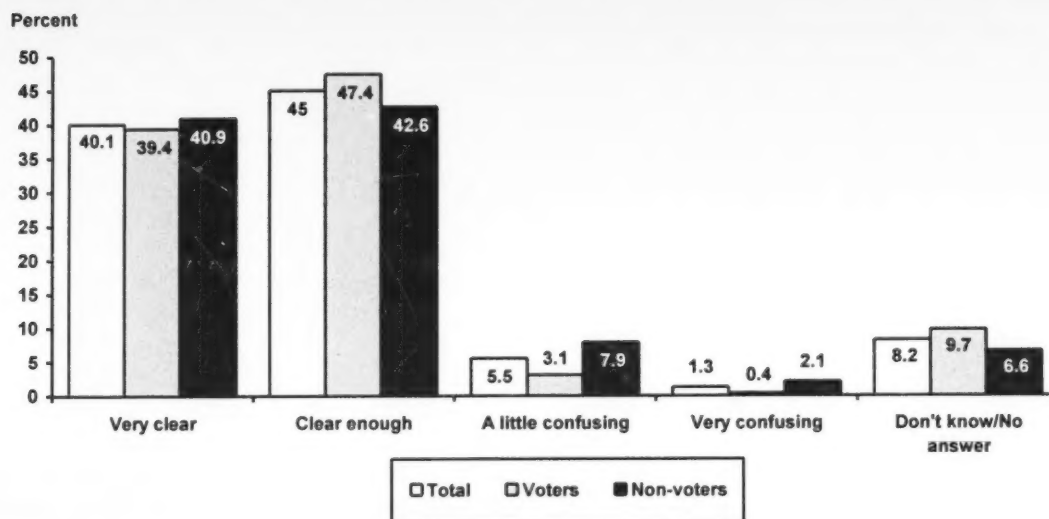
Table 55 Watched Elections Canada TV Commercial

Table 56 Found TV Commercial Clear or Confusing



As a final subject for investigation in this section, tables 55 and 56 report the results of questions asking whether respondents saw the television “commercial” run by Elections Canada at the time of the 2000 election campaign asking “Are you on the list?” This informational announcement became the subject of some controversy, since it contained the message that those who were not on the list of electors could not vote, without mentioning that such registration could be achieved on polling day at the polls. Thus, some commentators felt that this message might discourage turnout.

The results of these inquiries indicate that the television advertisement appears to have achieved wide visibility and impact, since over two thirds of respondents (68.9 percent) could recall seeing it a year and a half after the fact (Table 55). Although we are not privy to information about the success of marketing campaigns for commercial products, it would seem likely that this kind of public memory about the marketing campaign for some product would indicate a good result. Further results indicate (Table 56) that few people report finding the commercial confusing. Only about 7 percent of those who saw it report finding it confusing, even “a little”. The number of non-voters finding it confusing was 10 percent, not a result that would provide support for critics of the advertising campaign.

12. Correlates of Personal/Administrative Factors in Turnout

A major correlate of voter turnout is **age**. We will use once again the division of the sample into age cohorts, outlined in Table 13 and used in Table 14. Table 57 presents the reasons for not voting presented in tables 2–11, rank-ordered by perceived importance for the sample as a whole, for the age cohort groups.⁸

Lack of interest stands as the most important reason for the entire sample, followed closely by lack of attraction to any of the parties or candidates. Both of these reasons are ranked high among all of the age groups, but lack of interest is mentioned more prominently in the younger cohorts. Another interest-related item, “didn’t care about the issues”, also ranks high among all age groups, with 36 percent of the all non-voters sampled rating this item “very important” or “fairly important” as a reason for not voting.

The personal and administrative reasons did not rank high in comparison to others. As we have already seen, not knowing where or when to vote and not being on the list of electors were rated as important factors by 18.7 percent and 17.3 percent of non-voters respectively. This cohort analysis reveals, however, that for the youngest cohort, (i.e. electors newly eligible in 2000), all of the personal/administrative factors with the exception of illness (which affects the oldest groups most) were rated somewhat higher as reasons for not voting. Thus, the cohort entering in 2000 is more likely to have reported being “busy at work” (as is the 1997 cohort) at a higher than average rate. This is true as well for being “out of town”, for not knowing where or when to vote, and not being on the list. It is interesting to note as well that the oldest cohort was also likely to report that “not being on the list” was important to them. Although the oldest age group reported relatively few instances of being left off the list, those who did experience a problem in this area felt this was extremely important.

⁸ In Table 16, the “very important” and “fairly important” responses are combined.

Table 57 Importance of Reasons for Not Voting in the 2000 Election, by Age Cohorts (percentages)

Importance of reason... (percentage very or fairly important)	(68+)	(58-67)	(48-57)	(38-47)	(30-37)	(25-29)	(21-24)	(18-20)	Total	V
Just not interested	31.4	34.0	46.4	50.6	51.8	59.3	57.0	59.1	52.9	0.11
Didn't like parties/candidates	41.7	40.8	56.0	50.9	46.9	43.2	50.7	45.3	47.6	0.08
Vote wouldn't matter	30.6	37.5	47.1	37.9	41.1	36.7	34.3	30.4	37.1	0.14
Didn't care about issues	42.9	28.0	35.7	37.3	36.6	32.8	37.7	36.5	36.0	0.07
Busy at work	16.7	14.3	16.5	24.8	36.9	33.9	38.6	40.9	32.2	0.15
Out of town	19.4	34.7	16.7	19.3	18.3	21.5	25.1	24.8	21.8	0.09
Didn't know where or when	28.6	12.2	12.9	9.4	19.2	24.4	28.5	28.4	21.1	0.15
Not on the list	25.7	16.3	15.5	16.8	16.0	20.3	18.4	24.2	18.7	0.08
Too many elections	26.2	24.5	20.0	18.5	21.4	16.5	13.0	9.5	17.3	0.10
Illness	41.7	20.4	11.9	11.8	8.5	10.7	9.2	10.8	11.7	0.16
N =	35	49	85	161	224	177	207	148	1 086	

As we saw earlier, only a relatively small number of respondents overall (7.5 percent in total) reported that they experienced a problem with the list of electors, or (9.5 percent) that their names were *not* on the list. Predictably, such a problem was more likely to be reported by non-voters, suggesting that the list may have had a small effect on the decision to vote for at least some respondents. However, Table 58 shows that problems are more clearly evident among the very youngest cohort, i.e. those who first became eligible to vote in the 2000 election. Nearly a third (31.1 percent) of the non-voters in this group reported that their names were not on the list. The number is also much higher among voters in this age group (14.3 percent) than in any other age category. While there are undoubtedly always going to be problems associated with registering newly eligible voters, the data clearly suggest that this is an area where improvements might be realized.

The data for the penetration of the pre-election TV commercials show that it was very high among all of the age groups. The coverage is as high among younger groups as in the older cohorts, suggesting that the public relations campaign reached the targets it was aiming at.

There is not as distinctive an age pattern with regard to finding out where to vote, although the numbers reporting such a difficulty are slightly higher in the four youngest cohorts than among older groups. The incidence is higher among non-voters, suggesting that the decision to vote or not may have been slightly influenced by the ready availability of such information.

In one section of the survey, respondents (both voters and non-voters) were asked to speculate on the possible effect that the Internet might have on their future behaviour. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they might use the Internet to check their registration information, or perhaps whether they might use the Internet to vote, were such an alternative available.⁹ Not surprisingly, younger respondents were much more likely to respond positively to these ideas. It is also encouraging to note that the percentages responding positively were high among both voters and non-voters, suggesting that the development of new voting options along these lines might have at least the potential to boost turnout. However, the results should be treated cautiously. It is easy for respondents to give positive answers to these types of questions, particularly if they have a high degree of familiarity with the Internet. We cannot be certain that actual behaviour in an election would follow accordingly, since some of the attitudinal factors that influence not voting would not be ameliorated by Internet voting options.

⁹ In this analysis, the response categories “very likely” and “fairly likely” were combined into a single category to indicate an overall positive response to the item.

Table 58 Responses to Questions Dealing with Administrative Issues, by Age Cohorts (percentages)

		(68+)	(58-67)	(48-57)	(38-47)	(30-37)	(25-29)	(21-24)	(18-20)	Total	V
Experienced a problem with list	V	4.8	4.4	3.0	4.8	7.9	7.6	10.2	9.1	5.6	
	NV	11.4	4.0	8.2	5.6	8.9	8.5	10.6	14.8	9.3	
	All	5.8	4.3	4.8	5.2	8.5	8.2	10.2	14.0	7.5	0.11
Experienced a problem finding out where to vote	V	2.9	3.7	5.4	4.3	6.8	4.4	4.1	4.5	4.8	
	NV	4.8	6.1	8.2	8.0	10.7	15.8	17.4	15.4	12.5	
	All	3.6	3.8	6.0	6.0	9.0	12.3	14.9	14.0	8.9	0.11
Reported name NOT on list	V	0.0	0.7	0.6	1.1	6.8	7.6	2.0	14.3	2.9	
	NV	11.4	2.0	9.5	7.5	12.5	17.5	16.4	31.1	15.1	
	All	2.9	1.1	3.6	4.0	10.2	13.8	13.7	29.4	9.5	0.25
Saw TV commercial	V	62.1	74.8	73.5	76.5	77.4	75.8	83.3	77.3	74.6	
	NV	47.2	59.2	69.0	68.9	69.2	62.5	59.4	63.5	64.2	
	All	58.7	70.7	71.6	73.0	72.8	66.8	63.7	65.3	68.9	0.12
Might use Internet to check registration	V	22.3	42.5	57.2	61.5	65.7	78.0	75.5	50.0	56.6	
	NV	27.8	38.8	35.7	53.1	60.9	55.7	65.2	70.9	57.1	
	All	23.9	41.5	49.8	57.8	63.1	63.4	67.2	68.2	56.9	0.21
Might vote on Internet	V	16.5	35.6	45.5	50.3	54.8	63.7	73.5	50.0	47.0	
	NV	31.4	44.9	41.2	55.3	65.2	59.9	65.7	70.9	59.8	
	All	20.3	38.0	44.2	52.6	60.6	61.2	67.5	68.2	53.9	0.22

There are a number of other socio-demographic correlates with the various items measuring administrative problems with voting. A summary of these is presented here, mentioning only those correlations with a statistical significance of $p < .05$. In most cases, the correlations reported here are rather weak (below .2 and often below .1), but they are worth considering because of the patterns they represent. In the summaries below, the statistics reported are those appropriate to the measurement level of the variables. In general, Cramer's V is used when one of the variables is nominal in nature, and Tau is used when they are ordinal.

Education: Those of lower education are more likely to report not being on the list ($V = .12, p < .001$). Subsequently, there is a correlation of ($V = .08, p < .01$) with encountering a problem making sure the name was on the list. There is no significant correlation with seeing the TV ad, but there is one of ($V = .10, p < .01$) with finding the ad confusing. There is a substantial correlation ($\text{TauC} = .245, p < .000$) with the likelihood of using the Internet for list modification or registration, and ($\text{TauC} = .19, p < .000$) with the likelihood of using the Internet for voting.

Income: The income correlations are similar to those with education reported above. People of lower income are more likely to report not being on the list ($V = .1, p < .01$); problems making sure their names were on the list ($V = .08, p < .01$), and problems finding out where to vote ($V = .09, p < .01$). As well, lower-income respondents were more likely to find the TV ad confusing ($V = .10, p < .01$). They would be less likely to use the Internet to modify their information ($\text{TauC} = .16, p < .001$) and vote ($\text{TauC} = .15, p < .001$).

Mother tongue: Those with mother tongues other than French or English are more likely to report their names were not on the list ($V = .10, p < .001$). In comparison to the overall rate reported in Table 9, where about 10 percent said they were not on the list, and 8.5 percent did not know, among those with "other" languages, 14 percent said they were not on the list, and another 14 percent said they did not know if they were. People of "other" mother tongues also reported more problems in making sure their names were on the list ($V = .10, p < .001$) and also somewhat more problems finding out where to vote. This group was also less likely to have seen the TV ad ($V = .11, p < .001$) – 62 percent saw it, as opposed to 71 percent of English speakers and 79 percent of French speakers. They were also more likely to find it confusing when they did see it ($V = .08, p < .01$). The only statistically significant French-English difference is that French speakers are slightly less likely to report that they would use the Internet for modifying their information ($V = .08, p < .01$) or voting ($V = .08, p < .01$).

Born in Canada: Those not born in Canada are more likely to report not knowing where or when to vote ($V = .15, p < .000$). For 18 percent of non-voters born outside Canada, this was a "very important" factor, and a "fairly important" factor for 19 percent, in comparison to 8 percent and 12 percent, respectively, for those born in Canada. In addition, non-voters born outside Canada were more likely to say that not being on the list ($V = .08, p < .01$) was important. Of non-voters born outside Canada, 18 percent said not being on the list was "very important" and 4 percent said it was "fairly important"; the comparable figures for those born in Canada are 12 percent and 8 percent. In addition, those born outside Canada were more likely to report a problem finding out where to vote ($V = .06, p < .05$), and also were less likely to have seen the TV ad ($V = .06, p < .05$).

Community size: People living in large cities are more likely to report not being on the list ($V = .08, p < .001$). Table 9 shows that 9.7 percent overall said they were not on the list, whereas the figure for the "large city" residents is 13.8 percent. The only other correlate with community size is related to the Internet. Residents of larger cities say they would be more likely to use the Internet to modify their information or register ($\text{TauC} = .14, p < .000$) and to vote ($\text{TauC} = .13, p < .000$).

Length of residence: There are a number of correlations between mobility, as measured by the length of time people have resided in their current community and administrative variables. Non-voters who have resided for a shorter time in their current community are more likely to say that not knowing where or when to vote was important in 2000 ($\text{TauC} = .09, p < .001$). They are more likely to say they were not on the list of electors ($V = .19, p < .000$), and also that they experienced problems in making sure that their names were on the list ($V = .13, p < .000$) and finding out where to vote ($V = .13, p < .000$). The more mobile are more likely to say they would use the Internet to register or modify the list ($\text{TauC} = .09, p < .001$) and to vote ($\text{TauC} = .10, p < .001$).

Gender: There are few gender relationships. Women are more likely to report not voting because they were ill ($V = .14, p < .001$), a fact perhaps explained by age. They were slightly less likely to have seen the TV ad ($V = .05, p < .05$), but also less likely to have been confused by it if they did see it ($V = .11, p < .001$).

13. Further Age Cohort Analysis

We looked earlier in this report (tables 29–30) at the sense of “civic duty” among Canadians, on the grounds that such a feeling underlies consistent electoral participation for many of those who vote regularly. The responses to this item are examined in greater detail in Table 59, which breaks the answers down by age cohorts. The sense of civic duty was much more evident among older respondents. A noticeable drop-off in the belief in civic duty with respect to voting occurs among the cohorts entering the electorate from 1993 onward. An approximately equal number of respondents (37.4 percent overall) believe that voting in elections, if not “essential”, is at least “very important”. While these two categories together account for nearly three quarters of responses to this item, it is clear that not as many respondents in the younger age groups share these views. Respondents feeling that voting is only “somewhat important” or “not at all important” tend to be concentrated in the younger age groups. This suggests that the belief that voting constitutes a “civic duty” may be declining in more recent generations.

Table 59 Perceived Importance of Voting in Elections, by Age Cohorts (percentages)

	(68+)	(58–67)	(48–57)	(38–47)	(30–37)	(25–29)	(21–24)	(18–20)	Total
Essential	40.6	42.9	48.8	37.6	36.2	28.8	22.0	27.6	35.4
Very important	49.3	40.8	34.4	36.5	32.2	37.1	38.4	42.4	37.4
Somewhat important	6.5	7.6	12.0	20.1	26.4	26.2	31.0	21.8	20.6
Not at all important	2.9	5.4	4.0	5.2	4.7	7.5	7.1	8.2	5.7
Don't know/No answer	0.0	3.3	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.4	1.6	0.0	0.9
N =	89	184	250	348	401	267	255	170	2 014
V =	0.25								

Finally, we asked respondents whether they were likely to vote in the next federal election. This is an easy question to which to give a positive response, since it involves little real commitment. We would expect that only determined non-voters would respond negatively.¹⁰ Seen in this light, the response patterns are not encouraging. Slightly under 20 percent of all respondents indicate that they would be unlikely to vote.

Table 60 Attitudes Toward Voting and Elections, by Age Cohorts (percentages)

		(68+)	(58–67)	(48–57)	(38–47)	(30–37)	(25–29)	(21–24)	(18–20)	Total	V
Not likely to vote in next federal election	V	1.0	3.7	1.2	2.7	1.7	1.1	4.1	0.0	2.0	
	NV	42.9	30.6	38.8	43.1	32.4	39.5	35.1	20.3	34.8	
	All	11.5	10.9	14.0	21.3	18.9	26.5	29.0	17.6	19.7	0.11

¹⁰ The responses “not very likely” and “not at all likely” are combined for purposes of analyzing this item.

The percentage rises to over a third among non-voters in the 2000 election. And, it tends to be highest among the young middle-age groups, suggesting that the patterns of not voting characterizing recent elections may continue well into the future. While there is, of course, considerable fluctuation in not voting at the individual level from one election to another, these results may be read as suggesting that, for a considerable number of respondents, not voting is a deliberate act and not merely a function of busy work schedules or short-term pressures.

Conclusion

Much of the data we have explored in this report leads to the conclusion that **voting rates will likely continue to decline in Canada**. The voting rates of generations entering the electorate in the last two decades, and particularly since 1993, are substantially lower than those of previous generations. While "life cycle" effects help to increase the low initial participation rate of all generations, they have not brought those who entered the electorate during the Mulroney or Chrétien years up to the levels of the Trudeau-era entrants. And even those Canadians, now in their 40s and 50s, vote at lower rates than older citizens. There has been a long-term secular decline in the voting participation of successive generations of Canadians, one that will be very difficult to reverse with short-term, small-scale reform measures.

Added to the problem of generational decline is the effect of declining party competition, at least as viewed by the public. Part of the answer to the emerging problem of voter turnout has been a growing perception of the meaninglessness of electoral participation. This meaninglessness is felt in two senses. The first is the lack of a strong opposition that would place the overall outcome of a federal election in doubt, and spark interest in the campaign. The second is the lack of party competition at the local constituency level in a substantial number of ridings. While one can never predict with certainty that this situation is likely to continue, there are few signs that the Canadian party system is about to become more competitive in the near future. Unless some unexpected developments change this situation, there is no reason to expect that people will start voting at substantially higher rates. The upcoming leadership changes in many of the major parties may spark some renewed interest in the next election, but this is likely to be temporary unless the fundamental competitive situation changes.

This rather pessimistic conclusion is not to suggest that nothing can be done, either in the short- or the longer-term, to encourage participation, or to render the voting process more accessible. We believe that the evidence assembled in this report indicates that further efforts, which might have some beneficial impact, could be made in the areas of education and administration of elections.

First, with regard to **education**, we may recall the evidence in Table 43 that a majority of those interviewed for this report believes that improvements in education and information to prospective voters are the best methods of interesting young people in politics and elections. Increased attention to civics education in the schools, particularly as it pertains to social and political participation, will convey a positive message about the benefits of interacting with others in the fulfillment of civic duties. Elections Canada supports this educational function by providing information, and election-related materials, to schools and to other groups that request it.

When it comes to the subject of **electoral reforms**, there is no widespread movement for the wholesale replacement of our current electoral system, or other major electoral reforms. However, we were impressed in this study with the receptivity of many Canadians to changes in the electoral system, particularly in regard to the introduction of proportional representation. There is an active debate in Canada at the moment on these matters, which is likely to continue

and intensify. To the extent that this debate raises issues of the requisites of democratic citizenship, and the most desirable institutional structures to allow its exercise, the possibility exists for a rekindling of public interest in electoral participation.

Finally, with regard to **election administration**, there is considerable evidence from this study that more needs to be done to ensure the registration of the maximum number of citizens, particularly young people becoming eligible by virtue of age, in the National Register of Electors. In addition, the predominance of reasons for not voting in this study relating to lack of time or absence from the constituency lead to the observation that new technologies could help to provide solutions to these problems. In particular, it appears that the public would support the introduction of a system of Internet registration and information modification, and Internet voting. This support is particularly apparent from young people who have not voted in recent elections but who expressed a desire to do so using the computer. While it is impossible to estimate with total accuracy how many people would make use of such Internet facilities, especially among those who currently do not go to the polls, there is no reason to dismiss the possibility that such an administrative change would have a beneficial effect on the turnout rate.

